

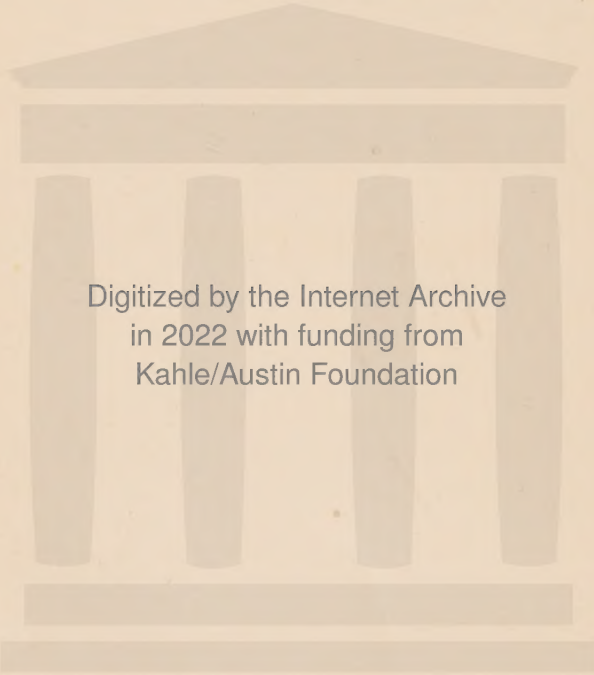
CHRISTIAN
FOCUS

FRANCIS J. McCONNELL

50
Presented To
Florence Wraight
By Rev. & Mrs. Haw
May. 18th / 1917.

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CHRISTIAN FOCUS

Christian Focus

A Series of College Sermons

By

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Cincinnati:

JENNINGS & GRAHAM

New York:

EATON & MAINS

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NOTE

THESE sermons were delivered in Appleton Chapel, Harvard University, during a two years' service as a member of the Board of Preachers of the University. Their publication has been requested by some who are interested in the problem of preaching to college students. I take this opportunity of thanking Professor Edward Caldwell Moore, Chairman of the Harvard Board of Preachers, for the continuous kindness shown me during the period of my association with him upon the Board.

FRANCIS J. McCONNELL.
June, 1911.

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I
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“ . . . and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.”—Mark 8: 25.

THE symbolic fruitfulness of this story of the healing of the blind man is obvious both to critical and uncritical readers. We are told of sightless eyes which under the touch of Christ came first to behold men as trees, walking. The second touch of Christ brought complete restoration, so that the eyes saw all men clearly. The suggestiveness is at once apparent. The story furnishes us a starting point for the consideration of the power of increasing closeness to Christ to bring our spiritual vision to its right focus. Taking the story as it stands it would seem that the man before us passed out of a state in which everything was too big—the men appearing like walking trees—to a state in which

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he saw all men clearly, the men as men and the trees as trees. There was a loss in the apparent size of the objects of view, but a gain in the distinctness with which they were seen. So in the realm of spiritual sight the repeated approaches to Christ bring our minds to greater precision and definiteness in our knowledge of truth. This does not necessarily mean that the increasing familiarity with Christ adds to our stock of knowledge, and it certainly does not mean that everything looks simple to us after we have caught the spirit of Christ, but it does mean that the spirit of Christ helps us to focus our knowledge aright. We get the correct point of view and the true sense of perspective from contact with Christ.

We need not enter into long argument to show the value of the power of right focusing for our knowledge. It is sometimes said that the first glance at the moon through a large telescope is apt to be disappointing. We had expected to see a larger moon than appears. In only an

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instant, however, we discover that the value of the telescope is not in its power merely to magnify, but rather in its power to handle the rays of light so truly and so exactly that the moon appears with new distinctness. The wise training of the mind proceeds, not so much on the principle that the mind is to have everything made large, as on the principle that great intellectual service is rendered in making a mind an instrument of precision: and high intellectual development is apt to take the line of increasing precision of intellectual touch. The aim is to improve the mental focus. The later speeches of a great orator, for example, may at first reading disappoint us a little as compared with the earlier. The speeches of the earlier years deal in larger terms, with more of flourish and even of systematic completeness, than do the later. The later utterances, however, soon show their superiority in the exactness of their focus. There may be a plain, undorned straight-awayness about them which does not seem oratorical—some things once

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deemed worthy of emphasis may be omitted altogether—but the impression is of a closer approach to reality and of a better sense of the relative values of things. Through the long training of experience the mind has become adjusted to the problems about which it has a message.

Now, the spirit of Christ does something of this same service in the religious realm. Christ brings focus to our religious thinking and activity and sentiment. Christ makes our men men, and our trees trees. It is true that many a Christian disciple makes a mistake at this point. Christianity is sometimes represented as if it consisted in taking clear views and making them hazy, making the men look like trees and the trees look like men for the sake of a general largeness of view which has been often regarded as very important. No one can exaggerate the worth of largeness of view, but after all no view is entirely worth while until the objects assume something of their proper proportions. This mistake, however, can not properly be credited to

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the spirit of Christianity, for the spirit of Christ clearly aims at making our souls instruments of precision. Christ does not come to men claiming to give them vast visions of new truth. He rather comes to touch the eyes that see men as trees walking and to focus the vision so that they seize their objects without distorting them.

Suppose we apply our thought for a moment to some of the problems raised by Christian thinking. We are occasionally told that the field of proof of the existence of God, for example, is not so large as it once was. The older among us can remember when the theologians used many of them to insist that almost anything around us could be made to yield a proof of the existence of the God of Christianity. The thinker needed to go no farther than the grass of the fields or the muscles of his own body to find proof of the existence of God. Later reflection, however, has made it clear that this particular logical procedure can show no more than the existence of somebody or something that made the muscle or the

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grass blade. With the passing away of arguments like this older putting of the design proof many have felt great sadness. They have feared that the field of Christian revelation has shrunk. In a sense it has. When we really catch the spirit of Christ, however, and feel something of the fervor of His moral enthusiasm, something of His deep and abiding passion for the great human interests, something of the force of His spiritual emphasis, we discern that this spirit itself has had much to do with the shrinking of the field of theological proof. Out of the spirit of Christ there come fewer arguments for the existence of God, but a clearer discernment of the center around which our thought ought really to turn. We may see less, but we certainly see more clearly. The very fact that our hearts cry out to God is put in the first place. The very demands upon the spiritual life are taken as rock upon which we can rest our faith. The field of one type of proof may disappear altogether. We find that we can not have that kind of proof, but we

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discover also that we do not need it. Faith in moral and spiritual life is put in the first place, and emphasis upon such faith makes not for haziness of view but for clearness of view. We now dare to look at the old proofs long enough to see their inadequacy without being panic stricken. We admit with all cheerfulness that the God of Christianity can not be discovered by scientific processes, and are not disturbed when we see that no philosophic argument is great enough to grasp the God of Christianity. The scientist does not get us much farther than Forces, and the philosopher has to stop with Causes and Grounds. But Christ comes, and, out of the fullness of His own life utters the word "Father," and our faith responds. By making the great needs of the heart all-essential He brings order into our thinking. We no longer put the finding of the scientist and the reasoning of the philosopher on the same plane of importance as the demands of the moral life. Having come to something of Christ's own conviction as to the primacy of the

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spiritual interests, we have faith in these and act upon their call for God, while we wait for the scientists to show us His laws and the philosopher to expound His ways. The function of proof notably diminishes, but the importance of faith in the highest and best increases. This is a clear gain all around. We give up something we never needed and take firmer hold on something we can not do without.

Another man comes with the complaint that our view of the Bible has shrunk since the days of his childhood. He declares that he can remember when all the parts of the Book were looked upon as alike important. All that was necessary was to open the volume anywhere and light would break upon almost any problem of life. Modern methods, this complaint avers, have changed all this and the field has lamentably shrunk.

We admit that there has in a sense been shrinkage, but only in a sense—the same kind of shrinkage which the man of our text experienced when he saw the men

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shrink to the proportions of men from the height and breadth of trees. There was much haziness about the view of which our complainant speaks. There was of course a large generality about it, but it raised too many troublesome questions. The shrinkage has come about quite as much through our increasing understanding of the spirit of Christ as through anything that the critics have wrought. We have come to see that the Bible has a focus, and that that focus is Christ and His spirit. The rays of light from the prophets and seers have to be judged by the directness with which they point forward to Christ. The rays do not move on parallels of equality. Their value consists in that they converge toward a point. We are no longer given to exhausting efforts to make the words of early seers mean just as much as the words of Christ; we point out rather that all the Scriptural movement before Christ takes its value not so much in what it itself is, as in its pointing toward the spirit of Christ. We judge the rays of light in the Old Testament by the

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direction in which they are traveling, and the rays of apostolic days from the source from which they take their start. Christ and His cross are the center of the Scriptures, as they are the center of all Christian life. The closer approach to the spirit of Christ brings this sense of order and plan into our study of the Scriptures. The Scriptures have center and focus. Really, though our complainant thinks the field has shrunk, it has become more important. The meaning of the Christ is the heart of the meaning of the Scriptures, and this is more and more closely seen with our increasing contact with the spirit of Christ. The figures which move across the pages of the Book are no longer of equal height. Some lives are taller than others, and the Christ is taller than all. Some events are of more importance than others, and the cross is most important of all. Christ has not shrunk. The cross has not shrunk. In fact, they are seen in their real importance when the mere trees become trees.

Still another complainant insists that

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the field of spiritual experience is smaller to-day than it used to be. If we come to close quarters with this criticism we find that the critic is very apt to mean that the field of the mysterious has diminished. It may be that he is one of that numerous class that have identified the distinctively spiritual with the altogether extraordinary. The students of the soul come to us and show us that rapt and ecstatic experiences are not necessarily the mark of the unusual presence of the Lord, and that even these experiences are not so extraordinary as we once thought them. To many this seems like doing away with feeling and thrill in religious life altogether, and they mourn for the old days.

Here again it must be said that the real agency at work has been not so much the investigators, as the spirit of our Master. Many good persons by prayer and right living have come to the true emphasis without ever hearing of an investigator. Through contact with the Christ they have come to see that the faithful, patient doing

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of the will of God is all-essential. If now they discover that the universe is so made that even the ordinary laws around us are fashioned to help that will in its doing, they feel that they have only cause for rejoicing. The witness of the Spirit to-day may not be as largely sought as once in visions and surges of feeling and sudden and mysterious impressions, but the witness of that Spirit has been sought and found nevertheless. It is to be found in the dogged determination of the true saints to do the will of God at whatever cost; and this which seems plain everyday human determination to do the will of God is itself a witness to the presence of the Spirit of God in the world. The Divine Spirit begets the human determination. And Christian assurance becomes an abiding satisfaction, which shows its worth not so much in the height to which it can momentarily rise, as in the persistence with which it endures. The satisfaction may not be so intense at any moment, but it wears better. The only thing we have lost in

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coming to this changed emphasis is a poor focus.

Now suppose we come to the problem of our thought of Christ Himself. We have all heard many times of the need of "magnifying Christ." Our emphasis on becoming imbued with the spirit of Christ may not be satisfactory to some. They may look upon the advice as incomplete. They may see in the words of Christ, for example, sets of precepts which are to be literally applied to all the changed circumstances of the changing centuries, and they seek to deduce from His words a rule of action for details of life which had not risen to the thought of men in Christ's time. They seek to find in the teaching of Christ not the spirit of life which is to enlighten and in turn lead to life, but a minute set of rules for modern personal and economic and social conditions. They would make the words of Christ as hard-and-fast as the rules of the Pharisees, and give Him detailed authority in realms which He never

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on earth dreamed of entering. When we come and say that the authority of Christ is not to be construed in such fashion they say that we are refusing to magnify Christ, and they say that the field of Christ's rule shrinks at our hands. In a sense it does shrink, but only in a sense. The quickest way to get lost in an inability to distinguish men from trees is to try to make the authority of Christ bear a meaning which He never intended. He laid down certain principles and fired these principles with the light of a divine spirit, but He did not enact detailed laws. We have to catch His spirit and then to move on our own judgment. And this is the true way to magnify Christ—simply to live in His spirit. This keeps the focus true. It may be that you have tried to magnify the face of a departed friend which the camera had caught by chance. You feel that the dear face should be made larger and be given a nobler setting, and you state your wish to the photographer who is to magnify and reset the picture. The result is apt to be disappointing—the

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lines become blurred and the expression is lost. The pictures of Christ in the Gospels were caught almost by chance. Clear as they are, we sometimes think we would like to magnify them into a nobler setting. Unless the focus is set by one who has caught the spirit of Christ the lines become blurred and the expression is lost. When we try to make the authority of Christ something other than deeply spiritual, we are apt to end in caricature. The men become trees and the trees men.

Through increased emphasis on the moral spirit which was in Christ the field of social redemption especially is coming to be more clearly understood. Here again the complaint is uttered that modern study has done much to limit the field of hopeful endeavor. The specialists have told us that there are more inequalities fixed in the nature of things, that the laws of society work with impersonal inevitableness, that the industrial and social system is interlaced and entangled with arterial and nerve lines which can not be touched without death.

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We have lost something in not being able to denounce the whole system as under the curse of sin. Of course there are revolutionists who decree death to the whole system, but we are not thinking of them but of the proclaimers of the gospel of Christ. The field for these seems diminished. And yet increased emphasis on the spirit of Christ, increased absorption with His view of God and of man, increased familiarity with his moral purposes, begets a moral insight which moves more discerningly than ever before. Wholesale onslaught is no longer thought of as Christian. The aroused moral insight which comes out of communion with Christ helps to show the evil of using an inequality fixed in the nature of things to bolster up an artificial inequality; helps to show the necessity of running down the impersonal social force to see if there be not a man at the end of it, gives something of skill to move among the arteries and nerves without fatal misstep. Where abstract philosophy would do nothing and the revolutionary radical would destroy

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everything, enlightened Christian spirit would first of all seek for a true focus. The day of wholesale denunciation in the name of Christ is passing away, for this indiscriminate onslaught is foreign to the spirit of our Master. There is less of broadside volley, and more of definite finding the range. There is less of overwhelming clangor like the midnight pealing of the old-time alarm-bell, and more of definite indication as to the spot where the flames are at work. To get back to the illustration suggested by our text there is a better focus. It is the possession of this focus which really puts the Church of Christ under such a heavy obligation to save the modern world from the do-nothingness of smug conservatism and the do-everythingism of fiery radicalism.

There is a finer, tenderer side to our thought. Contact with the spirit of Christ is helping us more and more to see that we are dealing not with large, vague, general terms in the work of redemption, but with friends and brothers. The huge terms "mankind," "masses," "humanity" were

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not part of the speech of Christ. He did not think of men in such blurred terms. It is less imposing to speak of friends and neighbors and brothers than to speak of the masses and humanity, but the terms which Christ used are better focused, and ought to lead to larger effort.

I know a life-saving station on a stretch of terrible coast. A river winds down past a village to make a dangerous bar as it slowly moves into the sea. Many a vessel has broken herself on that bar, and her sailors have been rescued by the life-savers near by. The life-savers work with deep devotion to humanity. Any man seen clinging to a mast yonder on the bar will call forth their mighty efforts. If, however, through the carefully adjusted glass they see what they sometimes do see, namely, that the men clinging to the masts are fishermen returning from the Banks to the village which lies yonder up the stream, friends, brothers—*it makes a difference*. General human considerations give place to special personal ones. Christ focuses our view

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upon mankind. The masses, humanity, and the race resolve themselves into friends, neighbors, brothers. The better focus ought to make a difference in the position with which we press on to the work of relief.

II

BETWEEN THE BLADE AND THE
FULL CORN

BETWEEN THE BLADE AND THE FULL CORN

“ . . . *then the ear.*”—Mark 4: 28.

OUR Master here tells of a stage in the development of the Kingdom between the blade which pushes its frail spire up from the soil and the full grown stalk which bends with the weight of the ripened ear. Or to look at a slightly different picture we may find illustration of the Master's thought in the condition of the fruit tree after the blossom has fallen and the golden harvest has not yet come.

Many of us would have difficulty in seeing the signs of the divine in half-ripened grain or fruit. We can very easily recognize the presence of God's beauty when the earth is carpeted with the beauty of the blade as it responds to the rain and pushes up into the sunshine fresh with springtime

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vigor. We delight in the signs of the divine presence in the splendor of the ripened wheat—the fields yellow with glory and the grain billowing with the pressure of the summer breeze. We might have some difficulty in seeing the divine nearness in the half-way stage when the stems are stiff and harsh and when the juices are strong and bitter. We can cry out with poetic rapture at the blossoms in the orchard, with every tree flaunting a beauty beyond the skill of the artist. We can sing thanksgiving to God as the wagons drive homeward in the harvest time, laden with the ruddy fruit. The stage in between, the stage of greenness and bitterness is not so likely to provoke either the poetic or the religious impulse. We rather pass over these middle stages as if we were not expected to pay much attention to them, and as if we could leave them to take care of themselves. By the way, we have here a suggestion to the holders of that doctrine of divine immanence which is to-day so popular, and on the whole so deservedly popular. Some ad-

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herents of the doctrine look only at the blossom stages and at the harvest stages. They can easily connect the thought of the Divine with these. They slur over the middle stages and do not think of the presence of God between the blade and the full corn. Jesus did not make this mistake. He recognizes the middle stage as a part of the divine progress. God is not absent during the movement through that middle stage. The plant or the tree is not left to pass from blade to full corn or from blossom to full fruit without the divine aid. It is on those in-between days that the sun turns its rays most directly upon the growing plant. We can see the beauty of blade and blossom very readily. We can discern the usefulness of ripened fruit. Jesus could see the inevitableness and the importance and the divineness of the stage half-way between the blade and the full corn.

The Kingdom of God is thought of in our day as coming in many ways. We may with propriety think of an individual life as intended from the beginning to be a

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sphere of the Divine activity and as intended to run through fixed organic periods, each illustrating some phase of the divine thought and purpose. Here again it is easier to see God in the blade and harvest periods than in the middle stage. It is easy to see childhood, for example, as a revelation of the Divine. God is round about us in our infancy, and we have the Master's own authority for the belief that the Kingdom of God must take the spirit of the little child as a hint of the spirit which should possess the Christian. We like to think, too, of the revelation of the Divine which comes in the thought and deeds of full-grown men and women. God is revealed most clearly in human life, and the fullest revelation of God must come when men and women are at their strongest and best. Incarnation is the method of God in revelation. The revelation must then be at its highest when the human instrument is at its climax of development. But how do we feel as to the in-between stage, the stage between childhood and maturity? Is it as possible to see the

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Divine in human life here as in the earlier and later stages?

It is part of the glory of our day, and a real sign of the Christianization of our views, that we are coming more and more to know the divineness of this transition stage. Some of the old fallacies are being laid away. The former thought that the youth was to be left to himself to find himself as best he might without aid from without is vanishing. There is just as much emphasis upon the need of respecting growing independence as ever, but at the same time more earnest inquiry as to how best to help the life thus finding itself and making its adjustments to the world and life. The doctrine that the youth must have a period of sowing of wild oats is gone. It would not be just to resort to over-elaborate supervision of youth, but we have moved away from the thought that the youth is to be left to himself to flounder through to maturity as best he may. We at least feel the need of showing more sympathetic interest in youth in this in-between stage.

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There are wider applications, however, of the thought of the middle stages as necessary stages in the advancement of the Kingdom of God. In the spread of the Kingdom in the life of the full-grown man there are experiences which repeatedly point to the importance of the truth which Christ recognized and set before us in this text. The full-grown disciple is full-grown only in the sense that he has come to the estate of manhood and looks upon the problems from the point of view of manhood. In the handling of the problems themselves the Kingdom is apt to move through the hardness of the middle stage on its way from the blossom period to the full harvest. Take the problems of belief. It very often seems to us that a new idea strikes us as a direct revelation from God. There is so much of kindling vitality in the passage of Scripture which really takes hold of us for the first time, or in the remark of a wiser friend, or in the sudden flash of insight as we ponder upon religious duty, that we may seem to ourselves to have heard a voice direct from

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above. But as we reflect we begin to discover difficulties. The sun-clear proposition is not so clear after all. We may be tempted to turn from the line of reflection in despair, if not in disgust. After repeated experiences, however, we learn that the progress of the Kingdom in our thought is going through the inevitable changes which mark the movement of any conception which is really organic. We learn not to abandon a thought when it passes out of the blossom stage. We know that if we persist, whatever vitality was in the conception at the blossom stage will carry the thought through to ripeness of a full understanding. If we take up blossoms only to drop them as soon as they show signs of harshness and bitterness under our thinking, we shall never come to the joy of the thinker's harvest.

So too with plans for the advancement of the Kingdom of God by actual practical effort in the world of men and things. The plan of the house as we see it on the draughtsman's print is attractive, and we

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look forward to the day when the finished structure of wood or stone shall stand before us. In between, however, is the stage of the actual construction, the stage of excavation and of scaffolding, when the plan does not reveal itself so clearly and when the glory of the completed building looks very remote in the presence of the heaps of stone and bricks and mortar. There comes a moment in the building of a house when the enterprise would seem absurd to the uninitiated bystander. What more absurd than to start up by digging down? Yet the higher up the building is to rise the deeper down it must sink. The larger the house the more absurd the early stage, and the most absurd plight of all is reached just before the movement down ceases and the movement up begins.

The military leader understands this principle. He may explain his plan to his king or his president, and he may make everything very clear on paper. The ruler may cry out with delight at the prophecy of

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the smooth working of part on part which is to bring the final victory. Now, if the general is wise, he will insist before he starts to the front that he is to be given a free hand in the execution of the plans, and that no kingly interference is to check him before he has a chance to fight through to victory. For in that progress from the drawing up of the plans on the maps to the surrender of the enemy there is an intermediate stage, a stage marked with blood, perhaps with setback, possibly even with defeat. In that intermediate stage between the contemplation of the map and the seizing of the standards of the enemy the most terrible events may happen. The general knows that these may come and is prepared for them. The onlooker may not be prepared and may think that all is lost. If the general has a free hand, however, he expects to win. It has become almost an axiom in war that no man wins a great success against a real enemy without first going so far toward disaster that the onlookers think that de-

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feat is certain. So in the campaigns of the Kingdom of God. The middle stage often is filled with bitterness.

The analogy holds good for the progress of those fine and subtle feelings which we believe make for us the very heart of Christian experience. The religious life may begin with a burst of joy. The joy may be the joy of a returning prodigal, or it may be the joy of a perfectly normal life awakening naturally to the delights of the Kingdom of God for the first time. After a while, it may be, the early enthusiasm begins to wane. The disciple regards this change with alarm, for all realize that a religious experience without some sense of satisfaction is a very sorry affair. The enthusiasm may pass away, and then for a time there is just a hard sense of duty to be performed. The late Dr. A. B. Bruce used to quote from the experience of John Bunyan to illustrate this very point of the harshness and bitterness of the intermediate stages in religious experience. The way out to-day is the same as the way of Bun-

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yan—by the doing of the will of God. The soul that flinches not comes at last to a new sense of satisfaction, something not subject to ebb and flow after the manner of the early enthusiasm. There comes a solid deposit of conviction as to the outcome of the repeated obedience to the will of God. The whole life moves inevitably in a certain direction, and the consciousness of that movement is itself a satisfaction. The life may not be able to locate itself with exactness day after day, but rejoices in the knowledge that it is upon the right track.

All this, however, may sound somewhat introspective, and our day has little patience with introspection. Suppose we look away from these personal problems to the advance of the Kingdom in the large realms of society. Here we are struck with the same fact—the Kingdom passes through the intermediate stage on its way from blossom to harvest. The historian tells of a law of rhythm according to which the nation that has moved upward as on the crest of a wave seems to fall back for a time. The psychol-

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ogist talks of natural and inevitable reaction—and in our thought of reactions we are apt to leave God out. We can retain all the truth in these terms by holding to our figure of blade, ear, and full corn. The intermediate stage is not a reaction from the blade. It is an advance from the blade. The intermediate stage is not especially beautiful in itself, but it is inevitable. The social student who does not remember this may fall into despair. You may recall that James Russell Lowell passed into a feeling of discouragement concerning the trustworthiness of American institutions after the Civil War. Lowell had shared with the other prophets of his day the great enthusiasm which lovers of humanity took in the outcome of the Civil War. He thought of the nation as purified by fire, and when peace came looked to see long steps ahead toward further moral advance. But after the war ended, the lofty sentiment throughout the nation seemed to give place to quite another sentiment. It seemed to Lowell, and to many others, that we entered on a

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period of political corruption altogether unworthy of a nation which had carried through a great struggle on behalf of the large interests of humanity. There is no need of our attempting to deny the corruption, but there is reason to believe that the corruption did not come out of or represent the real feeling of the nation. The nation was busy with new problems, and scandals came because the people were necessarily feeling their way. The nation that went into the struggle was not the same nation that came out. In our own time we are seeing principles which really had their birth in the struggle of the war period applied satisfactorily to the large national questions of whose satisfactory solution Lowell seemed to despair.

Still, there is much in the present-day situation to discourage us if we do not know this inevitable necessity of passing through the appointed stages on the way to the harvest. We see men of great wealth called upon to explain how they got their wealth, and we have begun to question whether any

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man who has money is not by the very fact that he has the money called upon to explain himself. We give ourselves to uneasy suspicions. What is the difficulty? Largely the fact that we are in the transition stage. We have hailed with delight the doctrine of the responsibilities which wealth brings with it. We have declared that democracy should in some sense extend to the control of the large material interests of the country. We have welcomed this idea as gladly as our fathers welcomed the idea of political democracy. We believe that the time will come when the interests of all the people will be taken into account in the ordering of the vast ongoings of our huge industrial systems. Just now, however, we are in between the day of the herald and the prophet and the day of the final builder. We must not think that God is at a distance from the transition struggles of the peoples. The most discouraging aspects of the transition have their ray of hope. If we say that men who have gained money wrongfully have done only what the

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mass of people would have done if they had had the opportunity, we have to recognize that the clearer moral consciousness of the people as the social consequences of certain courses of action have worked themselves out is solid gain. If the masses of the people would have done just what the men whom we condemn actually did, the reason probably is, with both the masses and the transgressors, that neither had thought out the social consequences or had realized the possibility of social harm. In any case we can find our way through only by taking account of ourselves and by looking our perplexities squarely in the face. We may thus see some ugly facts, but the very seeing of the facts is a sign that we are moving toward the harvest. Once we did not see the ugly facts. So also it is with the spread of Christianity on its thought side. How often do we hear it said that we are in an era of doubtful transition! Some deplore the passing of the days when belief was much readier than to-day, when the word of the Bible or the interpretation of the

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Church was accepted without question. These persons have not given up hope, but they think of the present day as something to struggle through as best we may, and they believe that some time we shall emerge again into the light. They do not expect to see many signs of the presence of God in an age of transition.

But why should not God be expected to show Himself in a time of transition? Why should He not show Himself in the very transition process itself? Are we to look for God merely in starts and finishes? How far could the blade go toward the full corn if God were not in the intermediate stage? The ready assent of an earlier time has indeed passed away, and we are now in the midst of searching scrutiny of every claim for religious authority. Some of the questionings are evidently conceived in a hostile spirit and some in a frivolous spirit, but the process in the main and on the whole must be healthy. In the wheat field we do not see the storm of changes actually take place within the root and the stem of the forming

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grain. We can not see these changes, for they are within and could be observed only with a powerful microscope in any event. The processes of criticism of the religious authorities, however, are in full view of every one. Every thinker prides himself on his openness of statement, so that many put before us conclusions which may not really be conclusions. There is no doubt some wild work and much crude work, but the general process is one of health.

The truth to which we must sooner or later adjust ourselves is this—that the world is not yet finished. We may save ourselves some inclinations toward skepticism if we but recognize this fact. Wise men have told us that if we are to look upon the world as at all perfect, it is perfect only in the sense that it is capable of indefinite improvement! Paradoxical as such a statement is, it does hint to us the value of the world as an instrument for the development of men. Better have a world unfinished, that the men who live in it may finish it and thus do something for their own development, than

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to have a universe in which no improvement could be made. Unless the men in such a world were themselves made perfect from the start they would have but little chance of attaining to fullness of moral life. But if we are to have a world which becomes progressively better, we must have this advance through the successive stages. Between the period of the blade and the harvest must come the period of the half-ripe. So the work of creation is not yet done. If we were to go back and speak in the language of Genesis we might say that we are not yet very far into creation's week. And further, we might find strength against impulse to skepticism in the fine refrain which occurs throughout the account which Hebrew thought gave of the steps of creation. At the conclusion of every creative act God said that it was good. If we were to imagine ourselves as spectators of such a scene as the first chapters of Genesis set before us, we might have been inclined to say nothing until the end of the work. The light came, but it shone upon chaos. We might

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have felt that it would have been better to leave such a world in darkness. But God saw that the light was good. No very great advance would seem to have come with the division of the waters so that dry land might appear, but God saw that it was good. The various forms of animal life which rose before the mind of the ancient poet might have seemed rather meaningless to us, but God saw that every step was good. Good merely in that it helped the work forward by a creative day? Yes—but also good in itself. If our thought were more nicely adjusted to the beauty of things in themselves without too definite reference to our conventional standards, we might see something of beauty in the fruit at the middle stage. The chemistry of the fruit in the half-ripe stage is just as exact as in the period of the blade or the full corn. The botanical changes are in the control of the same law that brings forth the blade and loads the ear with the ripe corn. So the universe is good. Barring the willful and arbitrary element introduced by selfish men the world is good,

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and good even as an instrument to bring the selfishness of willful men to naught.

The temptation of the young mind, however, may not be so much to skepticism of the world as a whole, as to a cynical attitude toward those actually professing to stand as bringers-in of the full Kingdom. In childhood days, it may be, we thought of the workers for righteousness in Church or State or society as themselves wholly given up to their causes. As we have come closer to life we have been disillusioned. There is, of course, a cynicism of youth which comes merely as a part of youth, and it is not especially important. It will pass away with youth. But there is a discouragement on the part of many a high-minded student which is serious, and only those who have passed through the experience know its bitterness. From childhood we have cherished admiration for some hero. He burst upon our early imagination with captivating power. Of late years we have realized the importance of the work he did. Out of his efforts came substantial results which abide.

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Yet the more we study, the more we are perplexed by the revelation of his weakness and frailty. We question the methods by which his work was done, and we wonder how so much that is evidently good can have come out of what seems to us to be questionable. Or we have been charmed by the moral fervor of some poet whose verse seems to us like the oracles of God, and we have later discovered weakness in the singer. Or some man who seemed to us to have a passion for holy friendship is seen on another side—the side of vanity and foible. The patriots and the saints, the heroes and the martyrs perplex us by their shortcomings when we look at them from the closer approach. We say there is a glaring contrast between the professed ideal of such persons and what they actually realized in their own characters. In moments of impatience we exclaim that such persons ought at least to be consistent. They ought not to profess so high an ideal unless they can live up to it, or they ought to bring the ideal down to a height which

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they can reach. There ought not to be this pious appeal to heavenly principle and this lamentable earthiness of achievement.

So we all feel at times—not realizing that the difficulty here is just part of the general problems we are discussing. The number of hypocrites in the ranks of the professedly devoted workers for the Kingdom is very small. The number of imperfect persons is very large. The workers are passing on, however, to greater purity. In a sense their inconsistency is their glory. They dare strive for something at present manifestly beyond them. As well might a half-ripe wheat grain be accused of inconsistency for setting before itself the yellow ripeness of the harvest time. And whatever good is done in the world is done by such workers, crude and imperfect as they may be.

In this as in all other matters Christ is our final hope. We speak much of the mighty faith which was in Christ. The manifestations of that faith were never more striking than when the faith was faith in men. Jesus needed that none should tes-

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tify to Him concerning man, for He knew what was in man, but in spite of all the sin and weakness He saw in men He trusted them. We are told that on one occasion He sent out seventy disciples to preach the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. When we realize how scanty was the disciples' knowledge of the truth even after they had been with their Master to the end, we may realize the imperfection of the preaching of the band of seventy. We may fancy, too, something of the mixed nature of the motives with which they went forth, believing as they did that the Kingdom was to be an earthly kingdom. Quite likely the traitor himself was one of the preachers who went forth at the bidding of the Master. Yet when these returned to the Master the narrative tells us that His heart was filled with joy, and that He burst forth with an exclamation that He had seen Satan fallen from heaven. The ministers were imperfect and their utterances were crude, but their work brought strength to the heart of their Master.

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First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. It is easy to see the glory of the Kingdom in the blade. It is easy to see God in the harvest. It is not so easy to see God in the half-ripe stage. Yet God is there, and the mind that has been touched with the spirit of Christ can see Him.

III
SPIRITUAL BIRTH

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“Except a man be born anew, he can not see the Kingdom of God.”—John 3:3.

“EXCEPT a man be born anew, or from above,” our Lord said to Nicodemus, “he can not see the Kingdom of God. Jesus is speaking of entrance into spiritual life. In His thought the Kingdom is the realm of life. The one great word in this Fourth Gospel is the word life. Jesus has come that men may have life and that they may have life more abundantly. In this chapter, near the opening of the Gospel of life, we get Christ’s thought of entrance into life. The Kingdom of Christ is not an artificial kingdom. Entrance does not come by legal naturalization or by merely formal enlistment. It comes as all entrance to real life comes—by birth.

We can best approach this passage by

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using the Master's own thought of birth. We need not confuse ourselves with theological or philosophical terms. We would much better keep to the figure of speech which Jesus gave us and think of the analogy between a process of birth into the world around us and a birth into the world of spiritual realities.

It may be that in other days some of you gave yourselves to the boyhood pleasure of gathering cocoons. You went forth in the fall of the year and gathered the cocoons from the twigs of the trees and brought them to your homes. You may have wondered at the toughness and impenetrability of the covering with which the caterpillar had wrapped himself to pass the winter. You knew that there was but one force by which that tough covering could be penetrated without killing the life within, and that was by the stirrings of the life itself.

You placed the cocoon where the sun could reach it, and as the spring months drew on you listened for the stirrings which told that the life within was preparing to

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pierce the cover and emerge into the outer world. The stirrings increased as the days lengthened, until finally the life came forth brilliant with the colorings of the moth or butterfly. In those days you learned two facts, and learned them without the help of books. You learned first that the life would not emerge unless warmth beat upon the cocoon from without; and second, that the life would not emerge except by striving upon its own part in response to the warmth without. If, after having placed the cocoon in the warmth, there was through day after day no stirring of life within, you knew that nothing would come forth.

Now this illustration, old as it is, has at least this much of value, that it has to do with a vital process and with the mark of all life—the ability to respond to a life stimulus. For the purpose in hand the illustration is helpful as we think of the birth into a new world of spiritual reality through the surrender of the human will to a warm force beating on it from outside itself. In all His speech to men Jesus kept before them

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His thought that there are two elements in spiritual development: the will of men and the will of God, and our illustration puts before us in a measure the manner in which the two may be pictured as working together in spiritual birth. All the philosophy we need for the purpose of the present meditation is just the recognition of the force of our own wills and the force of those influences other than our own, which we think of as divine. By thinking of these forces as other than our own we of course do not mean that we think of them as outside ourselves. We are at all times to believe the voice of enlightened conscience to be the voice of God, but that voice speaks to us in the inner depths. That the voice may be really outside of our own purpose we know by the bitter struggles through which we sometimes pass before we will surrender ourselves to its dictates. In whatever sense we think of God as outside ourselves, we know that we can come to Him only by inner response on our part to the influences of whatever kind which He sends upon us.

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The important fact for us to remember just now is that the process is strictly a vital process.

A word, then, about spiritual birth as really and deeply vital. With this idea of birth we know what to say to the teacher who would have us believe that entrance into the Kingdom of God means merely connection with an institution called the Church. This teacher is an institutionalist or a ritualist. There is for his thought saving efficacy in being a member of a Church or a participant in ritualistic observances. Coming into the Kingdom of God is coming into the organization.

We must of course be careful lest we minimize the importance of the Church. Here is a vast organization for the teaching of the truth and for the utilization of religious impulses for practical good. Here is a bond of continuity running through the ages, and observances sanctified by the usages of centuries. The hymns have been sung by countless thousands, and the prayers repeated by multitudes. We can see at

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once that, speaking generally, the seeker for instruction and inspiration in righteousness would be about as wise in neglecting the Church as would a seeker of mental development in neglecting the school. We can see, too, the unwisdom of an individual's working singly for righteousness when he has at hand a mighty organization to gather up his individual effort and double and redouble its efficiency by linking it to a system.

The real test of the force of an institution or a ritual, however, is what might be called its degree of heat. The institution's power over the life of the adherent is the degree to which it calls forth a response from his will. How much stirring of the will does the ceremony beget in the life of the worshiper? Ecstatic contemplation of stained windows is not a mark of will deeply stirred, nor is the thrill of enjoyment at fine music the sign that the Church has touched the depths. The Church may and does help men into the Kingdom of God, but only when there is warmth enough to rouse

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men to stirring lives. The Church may well be a part of God's good sunshine, but the sunshine must be so powerful and the rays must be so vertically directed that the life encased within itself struggles till it pushes forth into the new world.

The conception of spiritual birth as a vital process helps us also to see the truth and the shortcomings in the claim that we are born into the Kingdom of God by assent to creed or by acceptance of the Holy Scripture. Here again the question concerning the creed and the Book is as to whether they are so interpreted as to have the warmth of a veritable sun. Is there fire left in the creed? Is the Bible interpreted with directness? Perhaps the Scriptures are so interpreted that their appeals strike men at too great an angle. The vertical application of the Scriptures seldom fails to produce response, but it is possible to receive religious truth at a slanting or glancing angle. Is there a will response on the part of the life that assents? Mere verbal assent means little.

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Suppose we think for the moment of the doctrine of immortality as the doctrine is placed before us by Scriptural interpreters. A mere reader might accept the doctrine without the least actual response. He might assent because of the word of Revelation or because he thinks that science has nothing to say against immortality, or because the balance of probabilities seems to him to incline in that direction. Such assent might never stir the will sufficiently to make a striving toward the spiritual life. Suppose, on the other hand, the believer tries to make the doctrine of real force in his daily conduct. He strives to begin now to live forever. Now the determination is aroused. Now have begun those activities which will bring the man out of himself and toward God. The effect on life—this is the final test of the doctrine. There are many truths in the world. Holding them or rejecting them may make no great difference to our conduct. Holding the Truth of the Kingdom does make a difference, and it is this difference that counts.

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A man is born into the kingdom of spiritual realities as his will responds to the divine forces. The thought helps us, too, to protect ourselves against the emotionalist. We mean the emotionalist who wishes emotion for emotion's own sake. In a parable on the different kinds of soil the Master tells of the man whose life is the shallow layer of earth over the hard rock. The seed springs up quickly because it has no depth of earth. The root strikes the rock which will not yield and the weak stalk shoots promisingly into the upper air. The outcome is disappointing. There is large promise of quick harvest, and bitter disappointment as the stalk withers under the heat. The trouble is with the shallowness of the soil and the flintiness of the rock. The most hard-hearted persons in the world are the persons who seek emotion for its own sake. Under the cover of enthusiasm, which is at first charming and delightful, is the tough substratum which refuses to yield. Emotions are of value as they arise out of ideas and lead to action. So we have

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to ask of religious feeling the effects produced on the wills of men. Do the men do more for one another and for humanity? Do they seek to do more obediently the laws which we recognize as from God? Is the life determined with a grim persistence to find its way out into the large world of service? The life shut in within itself may be abundantly thrilled with the eloquent pictures of the great outside world of service, where men may be helped and God reached and yet may make no stir to reach that outside. Emotions have not become important until they have touched the will and warmed it into determined response. The best mark of the presence of God in a human life is a will set unflinchingly to do right. It is an odd shortsightedness which finds God in the feelings that may pass and which can not find Him in the fixed setness of will that abides. The satisfaction that comes from attempt to do the will of God is the emotion worth while.

We have spoken of entrance into the Kingdom as a vital process. We may next

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think of the result as a vital result. The word "birth" keeps us close to the thought that the entrance into the Kingdom is an entrance into larger life. To go back to our illustration once more, we think of a birth as a movement out of a circumscribed limit into light and power and companionship.

Spiritual birth means entrance into a world in which we can see. The man who has woven over and around himself a covering of selfish purpose can not really see. The realm of sight is the vast outside, reached as a man struggles away from himself. That realm can not be known till it is experienced. The boy might stand beside the chrysalis shut up within a covering of its own weaving and might try to whisper to the life within something of the glory of the great outside. Suppose the chrysalis to come to consciousness in response to the boy's messages. What could the chrysalis make of sight? The only way it could understand sight would be by struggling to get outside. Or suppose the schoolmaster

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tries to tell the school boy of the delights of inner seeing which will come with learning to read. The boy can make nothing of the realm of books until he has responded to the inspiration of a teacher and struggled out into that realm. Then he can see what happened thousands of years ago. He can look around the world or off into other worlds or back across the ages.

Likewise the kingdom of the spiritual realities is a realm of living insights. We say that the saint or the seer becomes aware of spiritual realities as truly as an ordinary man becomes aware of material realities. That the ordinary man does not see what the seer beholds, is no indication that the seer is beholding the product of his own fancy. We sometimes make the mistake of speaking of the realities which are common to all as if they are pre-eminently the realities. As a matter of fact common-to-allness may not be an especially high proof of reality. There are many sights and insights which are not common to all. The ordinary gaze can not see what the scientist

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can see. The scientist has struggled toward his power to see as one might struggle for birth into a new world. The scientist's world is an altogether different order from ordinary worlds, or rather from the worlds of every-day experience. The astronomer sees other heavens than those the uninitiated gaze upon. The geologist glances at a line on a rock and hears the washing of ancient seas. The physicist moves in a world not of stuffs, but of forces, and the biologist can hardly be brought to talk of ranges of life above the reach of the microscope. All these have yielded to scientific impulses and have been born into worlds different from ours. They do not much live in our world. They come down into our world for certain practical purposes, but their world is other than ours. So with those who have been born into the kingdom of art, where the true artist lives and moves and has his being. A bystander from the street might ask why the artist sits for hours contemplating the picture in the gallery. The man from the street who knows only

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the street declares that he can not see anything in the picture. To which the reply might well be, "Do you not wish that you could?"

Do you not wish that you could? This is the only answer to be given him who declares that he can see nothing in the service of God and humanity. The openness to the finer insights, the susceptibility to the subtler meanings, the awareness of spiritual values—this is the life of him who has found his way into the Kingdom of Christ. Except a man be born from above he can not see the Kingdom of God. The passage might have as well been, that except a man be born from above he can not see. He can not fully see anything without birth into a perception of moral and spiritual values. Sight does not concern itself merely with surfaces. These are for mere eyesight. The sight that sees is the sight open to the spiritual. And such sight comes not to one shut in to one's self and to one's own interests. The struggle must be upward and outward. Birth is first of all a movement

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outward toward the light as the will sets itself to do the will of God. The sight comes not from day-dreaming or from floating on the wings of fancy. Sight is the vision which comes from the life out in the free spaces.

The outside kingdom, the kingdom of the service of man and God, is a kingdom of unfolding powers. The life inside the shell has organs for which the inside can furnish no room. The butterfly can not fly inside the shell. Power does not show itself at its highest and best until it moves outward from self.

Here is a man gifted with the power of speech. He has the peculiar intellectual and emotional equipment which enables him to rise before his fellows and sway them by his words. To rare native endowment he adds the thorough training of the schools. He has fed his thought on the noblest literature and has trained himself to thorough craftsmanship in his art. Let, however, the people suspect that this orator's thought is ever of himself, or let them discover that

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his speech is for hire. The power is gone. The path to effective leadership through speech is through earnestness and sincerity which the speech reveals in the speaker and kindles in the hearer. The passion for a cause, or the desire to relieve humanity from peril, or to make the ways of God plain to men—this it is that makes for eloquence. There is ground for the old adage that eloquence is a virtue.

As with leadership in speech, so with other phases of leadership. It is axiomatic in the moral kingdom that a man can not serve as effectively with a little motive as with a large one. Here and there a scientist may be as effective through love of money or through mere professional pride as another may be through a desire to serve the world. We could not believe, however, that a motive centered upon one's own self could draw out one's powers as could a desire to serve the large outside. The great powers are, an excellent teacher has told us, largely by-products. That is to say, they do not unfold as the result of our

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direct effort to develop them. They unfold themselves as a man loses himself in the service of the vast outside. That is where the Kingdom of God is, we must ever remember,—on the outside of the shell which would shut us in upon ourselves. He that would save his life must lose it. This would not be true if we were dealing with the artificial and mechanical. An artificial creation may be put over against ourselves to be wrought into greater excellence simply for the thing in itself. But life, to be found, must be lived, and life requires room. No little self-centered purpose furnishes the room which a Christian must have.

The Kingdom of God is the realm of companionships. The life shut in upon itself is the unsocial, often the anti-social, life. The strict individualist is the life inside the cocoon shell. The fellowships are all on the outside. Lives are born to bring them into fellowship with other lives. The man shut in upon himself and serving only himself does not know companionship. No fellowship in the world can compare with

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the comradeship of service. Hence the affection for each other on the part of soldiers who have served through long campaigns together. The bond is not merely the fact that the soldiers have fought together, but that they have fought together for a cause.

Jesus told His disciples to count themselves fortunate when they were persecuted, for "so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." The meaning seems to be that in suffering as the prophets suffered the disciples would come into an understanding of the prophets which they could attain in no other way. A student might master the words of a prophet, he might stand on the spots where the prophet had spoken, and try to reproduce the stirring incidents of the prophet's career. He could not by any one of these means or by all of them combined arrive at the sympathetic appreciation of the prophet which he could reach in one instant's heroic defense of some truth. Jesus said again that except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone. He meant, of

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course, that the path to self-multiplication is through self-sacrifice. The words imply also the sympathetic companionship into which a man comes who gives himself to the service of the Kingdom.

The companionship of the Kingdom! Birth into the Kingdom of God means coming out into the universe which is our proper home. It means coming into the realm which has been provided for us. It means coming into communion with all the forces which make toward righteousness. The seer cried out that God has made us for Himself and that we find no rest until we find it in God. We can not find God by turning inward upon ourselves and by refusing to be born into that life outside ourselves.

The reason for calling upon men to be born out into the larger life of service is that the life out there is worth while on its own account. Where in this world do we reach anything worthy to stand by itself in its own right? Where more truly than in the thought of personal life? The

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good man is an end in himself. And yet the good man attains the end by using himself as an instrument to bring the Kingdom of God and of humanity. The life of the good man in all its outreaching services is the good supremely worth while. The man is born just for the sake of life itself—just for the sake of the experiences which come with touching our fellows and touching God.

We have emphasized this thought of what lies beyond birth just because of that widespread misunderstanding which would conceive of spiritual birth as an event which stands apart by itself. The birth is the entrance into life, and the entrance is for the sake of the life. We push through doors for the sake of what lies beyond the doors. We walk in paths for the sake of what they lead us to. We are born to get into life, and the word "birth" hints to us how deeply a realm of life the Kingdom of God is. It is important for a man to be born, but to stop at birth is a calamity. It is well for a man to know the date of his birth, but

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much more important for him to be alive. It may be that some of us can remember an experience which caused the first conscious thrill of patriotism. We came upon a picture in a book of battles, or we saw for the first time a tattered battleflag, or we heard the strains of martial music. Under the inspiration of such experience our childish hearts responded with thrill. But we would not care to identify our patriotism with that first entrance into a new world of feeling. The fact above all others important is that we now love our country and would if necessary offer our lives for her, and this whether we ever had any such initial thrill in childhood or not.

It may be we can recall the first time we learned to spell a word. We puzzled over the letters until at last they yielded their secret and we looked out through the marks upon the page and saw a tree or a rose. Yet the important fact is that we can now read. We have long ceased to quarrel over the precise form the struggle may take as a man looks out toward the

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Kingdom of God. The essential is for the man to find his way into that Kingdom, and that right speedily. The real proof that a man has been born is that he is alive. The life is all-essential.

We can not leave this passage without a word about the characters between whom the conversation took place. Here is Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night. We do not know the precise steps by which his mind began to struggle toward the life in Christ, but there are signs that he did so struggle. The second time we see him he is not the man of the night, but of the day. He dares ask a question in the Sanhedrin as to the right by which the Sanhedrin has condemned Jesus without having heard His case. We must remember that Jesus did not ask Nicodemus to come into the band of His immediate disciples. Jesus simply uttered a truth to Nicodemus and waited for that truth to sink deep. Jesus threw the warmth of His teaching upon the life of Nicodemus to draw Nicodemus out from self-centeredness. The third time we see

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Nicodemus he stands at the tomb to do fine reverence to the departed Leader. He has not been instructed in the claims of Christ as have the disciples, but in the hour when everything seems lost he is just as devoted to Christ as the disciples. It required even more courage for him as a member of the Sanhedrin to pay honor to the Christ than for the disciples to do so. We can not speak with dogmatism about incidents like this, but when Nicodemus passes from our view he is at least moving in the right direction.

And now a word as to Jesus Himself. We are told that from the beginning Jesus grew up in the love of the Father. If there ever has been a perfectly natural life it was the life of Jesus. Yet even He came to the truth about Himself and about His Father by yielding Himself to the influences which beat upon Him from above. The inner crises in His life we do not know, but we know that He always set Himself to do the will of His Father. He did not drift toward God. He responded deliberately to the

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teachings of the home and the Temple and the Scriptures. He sought communion with God in the deserts. Around Him from the beginning was the warm life of God. Within was the inner response. The outcome the whole world knows. But if it was necessary for the Christ thus to set Himself deliberately to do the will of God, how much more necessary for us? We have bound ourselves with selfishness as He never did. If at the best mankind can reach God only by struggle, how can we hope to drift toward life, we who may have bound ourselves tightly with our own self-centered designs! The call to us is to be born from above.

IV

THE FAIRNESS OF JESUS

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“Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man would come after Me let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”
—Matthew 16: 24.

THERE is sometimes an advantage in considering a religious object from the standpoint of the more homely, everyday virtues. For example, we have so often spoken of infallibility and inerrancy in connection with the Scriptural revelations that we have lost sight of some virtues in the Book which might even better be put forward as marks of inspiration. To speak more definitely, we hear all too little about the honesty of the Scriptures, about their utter sincerity, and their complete truth to life. It would be hard indeed to discover anything artificial in the Book. It is free from labored passages. The narrative is artlessly simple and always open and genuine. The writers

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are never acting a part or speaking with self-consciousness. In the description of the same events by different witnesses there is no semblance of collusion. In sketches of character there is no attempt to hide ugliness. There may be apology here and there, but there is no attempt at glossing over. There are no mock heroics. The Book, in other words, is a cross section of the current of actual life. This fact has given rise to much embarrassment to students who would rid the Book of every trace of inaccuracy, but whether the Book is accurate in every detail or not, it surely is honest in every particular. In commending the Scriptures to those who read them not it may be just as well to lay more stress upon the transparent honesty of the Book.

So also in approaching the study of Jesus. We see in Him the supreme revelation of the holy love of God. But love like His is beyond the thought of many whom we long to win for discipleship. It may be just as well then to speak of a lowlier virtue which may in the end prove to

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be just as great a virtue—namely, the fairness of Jesus. Jesus comes claiming to be the leader of men. He asks their allegiance as He moves in upon their thinking. He insists that they must be His subjects if they would attain to the life of purity. He demands their complete obedience if they would enter into His Kingdom.

The fairness of Jesus explains at least to some extent the severity with which He greeted those asking to be admitted to the band of disciples. He took a strange way to enlist students. He put before the candidates a cross. To be sure the cross may not have meant to the first hearers of the text of the morning just what it means to us. It may have meant more in one way to those hearers than it means to us. It meant something more disagreeable. The hearers were familiar with the sight of the cross, and while they were not able to put into it the significance which we to-day put into it, they knew the Master's words did not mean anything pleasant. If any man was to be Christ's disciple he was to deny

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himself and take up his cross. Now these words are words of honesty. Jesus did not want His followers to come to Him with false expectations. He put the hardships first. This was fair to the disciples and fair to the Kingdom. We hear much about the school of Christ. Jesus did not announce the great delights of the school, or its wonderful advantages. In the plainest fashion He announced its hardships. To one who came with eagerness to be His disciple Jesus would not even give permission to return to bury his father. The word of welcome into the school was that the dead should bury their dead. A certain scribe came and Jesus told him that the foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, but that the Son of man had not where to lay His head. Imagine saying this to a scribe! The scribe was the soul of order and regularity. He thought of study as a consultation with books and with regularly established authorities. What Jesus offers is the extemporaneous, wandering life which He Himself was leading. To another He

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would not grant so much as an instant's glance back at the old life. The man who has put his hand to the plow is not to look back.

If we have ever thought of Jesus as going about among men offering them rosy hopes of a pleasant fellowship and an easy entrance into a millennium we should begin to see our mistake. Jesus put the hard and disagreeable aspects of service in His Kingdom to the fore. In a sense He put the worst possible construction on the work of His Kingdom. That is to say, He made it appear hard from the very start. Even in the case of the disciples whom He called into His service He did not hold out prospect of reward. He told the fishermen to leave their nets to become fishers of men. He did, indeed, tell Peter, in response to Peter's characteristically blunt questioning, that those who had left all and followed Him would receive houses and lands and friends, but He added that these would come with persecutions. He could not have meant actual physical reward, and the

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slightest reflection ought to have shown the disciples that He did not mean material reward. Of course it was not all discouragement, but Jesus put the hard side out. A distinguished educator once said that nothing is more unusual than for a school to make a perfectly honest statement concerning itself. This does not mean that teachers tell falsehoods. It rather means that the teacher may be prone, all unconsciously to himself, to minimize the difficulties at his institution. The teacher sees the more or less distant reward and sees it very clearly. He may not be perfectly fair in his representation of the instruments by which the end is to be obtained. Jesus was entirely fair in His attitude toward the candidate for discipleship. At the very outset He told the disciple of the cross.

The moment we enter upon this theme of the fairness of Jesus as a teacher we are out upon a large field. There are many phases of the truth worthy of consideration, but we ask attention to just one other—the fairness of Jesus in guarding the dis-

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ciple against a wrong impression or a false conclusion. There are two types of academic honesty. According to one type the teacher is honest with himself. He tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He assumes that those who hear him hear at their own risk, if there is any risk. We can not help honoring such men. They are at times absolutely necessary for the advancement of the Kingdom of the truth. The occasion comes, and comes repeatedly, when the truth can be advanced only by the prophet who says harsh things and says them at risk of misunderstanding. Jesus was now and again under the necessity of breaking forth in harsh tones at risk of being misunderstood. His life and death are the supreme examples of willingness to go to the extreme in the statement of truth in the last degree radical. Sufficient credit has not been given and can not be given to the influence of Jesus in making possible academic honesty of this kind.

But a regrettable feature of this type of

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honesty is that it is likely to expose itself to be needlessly assailed. The teacher might save himself much trouble if he would be at the pains to make himself understood. And this brings us to the second type of honesty in a teacher—the type which is very jealous lest in any way the pupil receive a false impression. For this type of honesty the question is not altogether disposed of when the teacher has spoken the truth as he sees it. The teacher asks himself what his pupil has understood him to say. Language, after all, is an instrument. How successful is the instrument in producing a desired impression upon the mind of the hearer? Language is not for the sake of utterance merely, but for the sake of utterance to a mind addressed, and the important consideration is the effect on that mind addressed. Now, in some cases intelligibility is out of the question. Something depends upon the mind addressed. In all cases, however, the honest teacher will do all he can to prevent his pupils from getting a false impression.

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There are two scenes in the life of Jesus which are especially significant as instances of His anxiety to guard against a false impression. The first had to do with an individual, and the second with a crowd. You remember when Peter cried out in protest against the Master's thought of going forward to the cross. Just a few days before Peter had hailed Christ in such way as to receive the highest praise. He had been told that flesh and blood had not revealed the truth to him, but that the Spirit of God had inspired him. But when the disciple protested against his Master's going forward to crucifixion, Jesus broke out with rebuke. He declared that whereas Peter had but a little before spoken as the mouthpiece of God, he had now spoken as the mouthpiece of Satan. The rebuke was severe. Peter no doubt felt that he had the truth just as completely in the latter case as in the former. He reasoned too rapidly indeed, but he had spoken at once when the Master had asked the previous question. And he had uttered his protest out

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of interest in Jesus. The protest was the protest of genuine affection. Peter could not endure the thought of hardship coming thus upon the Leader whom he loved. He had spoken impulsively, but the impulsiveness was warm-hearted. Yet Jesus rebuked him.

The rebuke was necessary. Peter must be pulled as if with a jerk from a false conclusion. The one lesson for the disciple to learn was the lesson of the cross. The Master knew that to fail in that lesson was to fail altogether. So He wrenched Peter by violence into the true path. It would have been easy to remain quiet. But Jesus spoke.

The other instance was the dealing with the multitude on the occasion of breaking bread for the thousands in the wilderness. As He talked with the multitudes Jesus saw that they had misunderstood. They thought of Him as a leader coming to them with promise of material betterment. Jesus began to hear whispers that the people wished to take Him by force and make Him

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a king. All that Jesus had to do to have been put at the head of a revolutionary movement of this kind would have been to remain quiet. He could have said to Himself that He had not sought this leadership, that it had been thrust upon Him. He could even have said that the will of the people was an indication of the will of God, that He had spoken the truth as He conceived it, and had spoken it with entire honesty. He might well have said that, having gone so far, He could leave the consequences with God. Yet this is precisely the view which the Master did not take. He saw that the multitudes had misunderstood Him, and He would leave nothing undone to set them right. He sent the disciples away, knowing how easy it would be for them to be swept off their feet. He then went everywhere into the crowds breaking up the groups to prevent any concerted action. When He had thoroughly disorganized them He Himself took a boat for the other side of the lake.

A fruitful picture—this of Christ break-

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ing up the crowds. Christ believed in the people, believed in the masses of the people, knew the power of the popular will even under a system like that of Rome. But this realization gave Him a horror of a possible mistake by the people. In our days of so frequent appeal to the popular will we may pause to think of the anxiety of Jesus when He saw signs that the people had misunderstood Him. It is very easy to cast a doctrine broadcast upon the field of public thought, but not so easy to be sure that the people understand. Every man who is to go forth into the world to lead public thinking ought to strive after something of Christ's own spirit of fairness, the spirit which is distressed over the popular misunderstandings of a doctrine. We sometimes hail it as high craft in popular leadership when a politician shows the knack of persuading the people to take one course when they think they are taking another course, or when he is willing that the people should draw inferences which are not in his actual words. The politician

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is able to say that his speech did not imply the results which the people reached. He is able to take advantage of any good that may come of such maneuver and to disclaim responsibility for any evil. This may be very shrewd, but is it fair? Jesus, whose teaching meant more for the masses than the teaching of any one else who has ever lived, would not let one group go forward to action upon a misunderstanding. He ran among the crowds and scattered them. On the succeeding days He deliberately made His teaching so difficult to understand that the multitudes left by scores and hundreds. He cut his audiences down by hard sayings. It was splendidly honest and divinely fair. It was the fairness of a mind that felt the responsibility of leadership.

Jesus, however, was more than a teacher. He came to redeem men, to be their friend and counselor that by His counsel He might lift them out of themselves up to purer and fuller life. He dared speak the plainest of truths to men, and this out

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of a spirit of fairness to them. He dealt honestly with all who sought Him for help.

The honesty of Jesus appears in the directness with which He struck at every form of moral evil in His disciples. There was no attempt to approach evil by flank movement. Whenever Jesus saw evil He struck at it, and struck at it directly. This involved plainness of speech. It involved speech like that to Peter, which we have cited. It involved repeated rebukes to the other disciples. And yet His is the only fair method. We hear it often said that the only way we can really learn the truth about ourselves is by the criticism of our enemies, that our friends simply will not speak the word which is bound to hurt us. Yet this is because our friends have not always the spirit of true friendship. There is no more helpful passage in the books which tell us of the Master's relation to men than that which speaks of Him as a Judge. We often think of the word "judge" as having to do with condemnation, but if the word is of one who is really both friend

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and redeemer we can see what a helpful word it is. The Master spoke to His disciples as their moral critic. He speaks to men in the same way to-day. He is incarnate conscience.

A true conscience is always quarreling with evil. Its method is that of the direct blow at the serpent with the heel. The blows of conscience are never pleasant, but what a mercy it is that we can feel their shock! Jesus was conscience for His disciples. He spoke directly. He delighted to think of Himself as the Physician of men's souls. How do we regard a physician who does not tell us the truth? What do we think of a physician who sees a fearful disease at work on us and who does not tell us of the evil? Christ spoke always straight out upon the sin which He saw around Him. He spoke not as the scold who seems to rejoice in rebuke. He spoke rather as the Friend and Counselor and Redeemer. The quickest way to bring evil to its death is to see it just as it is, and then deal with it with a straightforward vigor.

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Here again is the fairness of the Master's putting the cross in the foremost place. He seeks for the largest life for men, and hard as the task is He would have men adjust themselves to the cross from the very first. We recall the message to the rich young man who came to Jesus to be His follower. This young man was in every way worthy. He had been brought up aright. He had kept the commandments. He had evidently come by his money honestly. Yet Jesus broke out upon him harshly, with a command to remedy his lack by selling all that he had and by giving to the poor. What was the meaning of this word? Did it mean that Christ was quarreling with the money of the young man? Did it mean that the possession of riches is incompatible with citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven? Did it mean that Christ could not see how advantageously this man and his money could be used for the Kingdom of God? It meant none of these things, but rather that Jesus, as He looked upon the young man, felt His heart go out to him in love.

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The Book tells us that Jesus looking on the young man loved him. But Jesus not only looked upon the young man—He looked into the young man. He saw the depths of the life, and saw there what was an instant later clearly revealed to the disciples. He saw the extent to which the heart had been given up to wealth. Out of mercy Jesus spoke to him. It is not ours to say just when and how words as direct as these are necessary, but the words evidently were necessary here.

What a tribute after all to this young man was the direct speech of Jesus! What an assumption the Master made when He assumed that this young man was strong enough to receive a revelation as plain and direct as this! We have spoken of the physician who must speak the truth plainly to his patient. It may be that in some situations the physician can not speak the truth plainly. The patient may not be able to receive the truth. But when a strong man stands before the physician we know that the physician's plainness of speech is a real

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tribute to the strength of the patient. To some men the physician would dare say, "You may be dead within the next minute." The man strong enough to receive such a revelation is entitled to it, for the sake of the chance for life which it may give him. So with this young man. Jesus was not trying to drive him off. He was trying to win him. He saw both his weakness and his strength. It was only fair that both should be appealed to. He dared tell him of his peril, and of the way out. What finally happened we do not know. Let us trust that the young man was worthy of the direct appeal, and that later he found his strength equal to the Master's demands.

We have in this incident something of a hint as to the fairness of God in dealing with men. The Divine fairness is indeed not fairness as men sometimes count fairness. Real fairness is so to treat men as to help them make the most of themselves. If there is strength in men which can be brought out by times of crisis, it is only fair that the times of crisis should

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come. From one standpoint the very hardships which men have been called upon to endure may well be looked upon as a tribute to the strength of the men. The greatest compliment ever paid the human race is just the fact that the Almighty dares to hurl the race out upon this sea of life in the teeth of a gale. If we accept the Christian revelation as to the purposes of God in dealing with men, we must believe that the redemption of the race is the supreme object of His care. If the race were fragile He would not have launched it upon this sort of sea. If the race is really strong it is only fair that men be given a chance to show their strength. We speak of our trust in God, but the great marvel is the trust of God in us. If the project of redeeming the race should ever fail, it would fail just because the Almighty had made too large an assumption concerning men. While there may be failure in some individuals, we may well cherish some of God's own confidence that the plain out-and-out appeal to the heroic in men will not be disappointed.

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Jesus puts the cross in the first place and appeals to the heroic in men. He does not flatter, He does not speak soft words, He does not prophesy smooth paths. He tells of a straight and narrow way, of a cross which must be lifted up and manfully carried. And He does this as the revelation of a God who is Himself heroic. The Scriptures might well have for their descriptive title, "The Heroism of God," though the idea of heroism varies as the Book progresses. At first God is a Hero of battle appearing for the relief of His chosen. Then He is the Hero of majestic theocracy. Then the idea of the heroism of the self-sacrificial suffering of God begins to dawn upon men, and the final glory is reached in the thought of the God who lays bare His essential life in the cross of Christ. He is willing to place Himself at the head of the army of burden bearers. We may differ in our thoughts of the meaning of the cross, but we all agree upon this—that the cross in some way shows the Divine willingness to do all that can

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be done for the uplift of men, at no matter how great cost to the Divine heart.

What, then, is the appeal of Jesus? Just the appeal to the highest and most heroic in men. If we come into the Kingdom of God shall we be in line for larger worldly success? It would be hard indeed to feel that the world is so made that it will not be more responsive in a material way to righteousness than to unrighteousness. But in any particular lot there may be nothing but a future of hardship. Those who give themselves to lives of work for the Kingdom as its prophets and teachers and missionaries can hardly expect large material return. Is the promise that events shall move smoothly with us? Not at all. They may or they may not. Is the reward to be in quick and sure understanding which shall forever lay all doubts to rest? Doubts may follow us to the end. Are we to have the mystic experiences which sustained the saints of other days? Possibly—but quite likely not.

What, then, is held before us? There is

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no attempt to disguise the cross, and Jesus does not attempt to hide His cross. If we are to be Christians there is only one way to deal with the cross, and that is to lift it up and carry it. What shall we have, therefore? We shall have companionship with Christ. Through bearing the cross we shall come to be His disciples in a way that we can not understand in advance of the experience itself. We shall know Him, and knowing Him shall feel that we have the essential knowledge. We shall feel at home with the God whom He reveals, and the confidence shall increase through the years. He Himself is the exceeding great reward. His thought, His spirit, His life become ours through the bearing of His cross, will at last be seen as of supreme value, and the other things will take care of themselves. It is the appeal to the heroic in us. That heroic is in us. It is only fair that it should be called forth. So Jesus, the Heroic Cross-bearer, the Revealer of the heroism of God, calls out to the heroic in His disciples. The call itself is as high a tribute as a man can receive.

V

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“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” . . .
—Isaiah 40:31.

THIS verse has seemed to many to be written in the form of an anti-climax. The most important achievement in the religious life would at first glance seem to be the power to mount up with wings as eagles. The verse, however, does not give the place of honor to this achievement. The words do not run up hill to a climax, but rather run down hill to what at first thought is the rather commonplace virtue of walking without fainting. From the viewpoint of this first-glance criticism, the verse ought to have read that those who wait upon the

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Lord for renewal of strength shall walk without fainting. They shall run and not be weary. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. Only the seer can mount up with wings as eagles. Anybody ought to be able to walk without fainting.

A book recently published deals with a series of remarkable transformations of character in a spiritually destitute quarter of London. The Salvation Army worked in this quarter with striking success so far as concerned the individuals whose experiences are recorded in this book. In each case a notorious wrong-doer was reclaimed from sin by a sudden crisis in his life. To some the crisis was as sudden as was the vision of Paul on the Damascus road. A sharp climaxing of the events of the life, a quick breaking up of the emotional depths, an instantaneous revelation of happiness within reach or of doom just at hand, roused the souls from the error of the false way and brought not merely the promise but the fact of swift relief. In every one of the experiences dealt with the life turned from

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sin by instantaneous conversion—with experience so genuine that the late Professor James gave this book great value for its psychological importance. Yet in every case the task to which the Salvation Army workers gave most effort was to bring the new convert to the realization that the sudden initiatory experience was but the beginning.

The task was to teach the beginner to do the will of God day after day when the conversion vision had vanished. Curiously enough the author makes use of the text before us this morning. He declares that it became at once necessary for the Christian worker to show the souls instantaneously won from darkness that the essential duty was not after all to mount up with wings as eagles with the glory of a sudden ecstatic experience, but rather to learn to walk day after day without fainting. In the light of experiences like these we must revise our first-glance criticism of the text and conclude that perhaps we have the better order as the clauses stand, and that

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walking without fainting is the climax of Christian service and experience.

The aim of the wise worker of to-day is in a sense to reduce Christianity to the commonplace. This does not mean trite preaching or mechanical utterance of fixed phrases. It means, rather, the utilization of the Christian spirit so completely that Christianity becomes one of the ordinary every-day forces as much to be depended upon as the most commonplace powers with which we are familiar. All the forces around us which are of use to civilization have passed away from the spectacular stage to the commonplace stage. Christianity, if it is to do its work, must more and more pass from the spectacular to the commonplace.

Suppose we had been present at that moment in the history of civilization when men succeeded in taming the horse for the first time. We can imagine something of the excited thrill which ran through that group of spectators at the triumph of the man who had found what must have been

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substantially the secret of the bit. Yet the first performances must have been more in the nature of spectacles than of useful demonstrations. We can imagine the frightened steed careering over the plains with the rider upon his back. We can see the meaning of the event for the after progress of mankind, but we know that the world had to wait for quite a different order of conqueror from the one who thrust the metal or the thong into the horse's mouth and leaped to a secure hold upon his back. The horse was not useful for the large tasks of civilization until he had been made a draught horse—that is to say, until he had been taught to walk and pull a load. If Christianity is the conquest of animal impulses in men, it must show its power not by putting a bit and curb upon the impulses, but by utilizing them for the discharge of daily tasks. It is a fine thing to see a man mount up with wings as an eagle in his control over an impulse that makes toward evil. It is a finer thing to see him control that impulse down into usefulness.

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So with the material forces, with the fire and the steam and the electricity upon which we depend in these latter days. There must have been a time when fire was chiefly a spectacle. We can well see how the men of another day might worship a force which would rise to heaven from a blazing prairie or a consuming forest. Fire, however, was not of much use until it had been made altogether prosaic. The touch of fire is in one way or another upon almost everything which we eat or wear, and that because generations of plodding workmen have learned how to bring fire down to earth and to earth's commonest tasks. The service which steam renders is not so much in hurling express trains across the land as in hauling a quite different order of train—that humdrum freight train on which the industrial life of the community depends. Electricity becomes of value only as it passes out of the spectacle stage to the stage of burden bearing and load pulling. We repeat, if Christianity is one of the forces of the world it must show its forcefulness by

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making itself one of the powers on which we can daily depend.

The forces which we have used for illustration, however, are impersonal, and Christianity is personal. If we move over into the personal realm, the realm of education for example, we find that the emphasis of wise teachers is increasingly on the training of the mind for the ordinary tasks. The simple power to pay attention is as valuable a gift as the schools have for the youth. The power to control the mind down to any sort of task day after day, this is the absolutely indispensable qualification if a youth is to succeed in business or professional life. Even the genius is helpless if his mind can not be controlled to paying attention, and yet the most ordinary mind is of service if it can be made to pay attention continuously. For a mind to walk step by step through a course of reasoning is of itself no ordinary achievement. When we think of the multitudinous distractions which lure the mind now to one bypath and now to another, we can

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see something of the value of the power to pay attention. Of course, some minds have more to pay attention with than have others, but education has accomplished one of its main purposes if it has trained a mind of whatever capacity to the ability to pay attention. Our Master has told us that it is our duty to love God with all our mind. This means first, last, and all the time the power to give undivided attention to the questions which come before us for consideration. When we reflect upon the fact that at least half the duty in any moral crisis is the duty of patient reflection, we may see something of the importance of the power to pay attention in the discovery of the will of God.

As it is with learning, so also is it with the art of expression. The genius may indeed make a great speech upon a great occasion without much ability to speak well upon the ordinary occasion. With his heart and mind on fire with a great theme, with a vast audience before him kindled to electric responsiveness by the greatness of the

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issue, a man even far short of genius might mount up to eloquence as on eagles' wings. Power of effective speech, however, does not show itself in eagle flights. Effectiveness of speech shows itself in influencing the wills of men. Men must be brought to decide in a certain way or to vote for a particular belief. In bringing about the actual result the man whose speech is of the plain, blunt kind which moves over an earthly path where men may follow is quite apt to be the decisive force.

After so much of illustration we may say that the need of Christianity is to apply to the problems of the various fields which come before us as spheres of duty homely and commonplace ability to walk. We hear much of the need of Christian patriotism, and of the duty of Christians to redeem politics. How is this to be done? Must some prophet arise to enlighten our minds with profound political principles? Do we need a political seer to arouse us to new insight? Must some mighty genius arise to show us how to apply the principles of

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Christianity to modern life? No! all that is needed is just the willingness on the part of ordinary men to work their moral insight out into political practice. As it is, cities have to be repeatedly reformed to cleanse them of wrong doers in high place. The reason is that the reform is spasmodic. The people rally with great indignation and cast out the offenders. But while the offenders are cast out with political fervor which catches public sentiment up as on the wings of eagles, they come back by the ordinary power to walk. They come back simply because there is not enough moral determination on the part of the people to attend to the very homely tasks which must be performed if the political life is to be kept pure. Purity of political life comes as purity of a city's streets comes—by the willingness of numbers of persons to do the work day after day which makes for cleanliness.

Another sphere for Christian service is the home. Here the entire movement of the civilization of our day is away from

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anything which would make for the spectacular. There is nothing spectacular about preventive measures. The spectacular has more often to do with rescues. Now there could hardly be found a father who would not be willing to rescue his child from a place of danger. If the child has fallen into a stream or if it stands helpless at the window of a burning building, not one father in a thousand will hesitate for an instant. To use a paradoxical expression, the willingness of parents to do the extraordinary for their children is one of the most ordinary virtues. The heroism of mothers in the face of deadly disease is among the most frequent of virtues. The willingness to work in the direction of prevention, however, is much rarer. Not many mothers could be found who would desert a child sick with infectious plague, but possibly many mothers could be found not quite equal to the task of daily house cleansing which will prevent the plague from invading the home. Precautionary measures mean drudgery. They mean watchfulness when

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the only incentive to watching is just the determination to do the duty lest the evil come.

The redemption of the world from the forces of moral evil is more and more the problem of the home. No dramatic rescue of the boy who has gone astray should disturb our sense of perspective here. The daily instruction in righteousness, the daily guard against the beginnings of dishonesty, the incessant warfare against the forces which make for whole-hearted integrity, —these are powers on which we must chiefly rely. The doctor who refuses to desert his post when the scourge comes is an inspiring figure, but not so honorable as the doctor whose faithfulness prevents the arrival of the scourge. The great sphere for sterilizing minds against the lodgment of moral evil is the home. The work is in the last degree humdrum and unexciting, and in the first degree important.

When we broaden our thought and consider these fields of social service of which we rightly make so much to-day, we are

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struck by the fact that what the world really needs is just the performance of those ordinary duties of which anybody is capable. We hear much about profound reorganizations and readjustments, but the Kingdom of God halts in its coming because of the tardiness of the common man in the performance of the common duty. Our Master has drawn for us a picture of rewards to be given those who have been effective in bringing in His Kingdom. The setting of the picture is vastly imposing. The nations are assembled before a judge. The reward has been prepared from the foundation of the world. That is to say, the world itself has in the thought of Christ been made as a stage upon which men are to be tested in their fidelity in the performance of certain tasks. Who are the fortunate? What are the tasks? Does the word read that the captains and the kings and the prophets and the seers are to come forward for supreme honor? The kings and the seers have their necessary place in the Kingdom, but the reference here is

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to quite another order of service than winning campaigns or founding kingdoms or uttering prophecies. Those who have given the crust of bread or the cup of cold water or the coat or who have visited the sick and imprisoned—these are the heroes for whom the reward has been prepared from the foundation of the world, and who are hailed as the blessed of God. Now, the striking feature about this picture is that rewards are bestowed for services which any one could render.

The minister at work in his parish, the social worker on the streets of the city, the Church visitor climbing the stairways of tenement houses, are many times surprised to see the hold they win over lives by rendering the ordinary kindnesses that any one could have shown. A calling card thrust under a door has more than once given such a worker a welcome into a life. Simply because the man on the inside of the door was famishing for some sign of interest on anybody's part in him. Of course, the unequal distribution of this

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world's material goods is a hardship, and must sooner or later be corrected. The unequal distribution of the world's sympathy, however, is just as grave a problem, but one which lies within the reach of the ordinary man. The world needs sympathy sadly—just the sort of sympathy the ordinary man can give, and which the ordinary man too seldom gives because he does not think of so ordinary a service as of particular consequence.

In those material readjustments also which we feel must be made before the Kingdom of God can fully come we too often think of the consummate stroke to be accomplished under some vast leadership. Quite likely the transformation will really come as ordinary men become willing to take upon themselves the little sacrifices involved in the readjustment. To shake a land loose from the clutches of an industrial system which may be clearly iniquitous, requires not only the leadership of some unusually strong man, but requires also, and much more, the response of public

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opinion—and yet public opinion is nothing but the sum of private opinions. These private opinions too often rest down upon the petty selfishness of this and that particular individual. We say repeatedly that this or that reform will come when the people want it. This can only mean that the Kingdom is delayed by the unwillingness of the ordinary citizen to bear sacrifices which may strike no one in particular very heavily. And the sacrifices would in all probability not have to be borne very long, for any movement toward social righteousness must in the end work for the general good. The difficulty is the old, old unreadiness to do the ordinary. We would prefer the larger sacrifice, but the opportunity for the larger sacrifice may not come. The situation here is similar to the plight which we sometimes meet when we attempt to arouse our fellows to contribute to a cause which all admit to be worthy. We are met by hypothetical and suppositious generosity which would give largely if the large means were at hand. The duty and the oppor-

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tunity which come with a call to make a small sacrifice are passed by. As a matter of fact, the world can not long be aided by millionaire giving, for the millionaire himself may be the product of unusual and unique conditions which may become reversed or unlikely with the passage of years. The world is not to be saved by the generosity which mounts up on wings as eagles, but rather by that which walks and does not faint.

From these plain facts of every day we may advance into some of the more intimate problems of religious experience. We know that the prayer experience lies at the heart of Christian experience. What is an answer to prayer? Is it a definite response to a petition for a specific gift, a response so definite that the petitioner is lifted out of himself with the realization of the presence of God and of His care for the petitioner? No doubt there are such responses, but they are not the part of the ordinary experience of the ordinary man. There is another answer to prayer, the answer which

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comes with the deepening of the whole life of the petitioner, an answer which comes as the life moves up and away from petition to companionship. There may be nothing spectacular in such experience, but it results in that substantial conviction of the nearness of God which comes from walking with Him. And walking with Him, in the Scriptural sense, does not mean any sort of spectacular or extraordinary consciousness. It means, rather, the keeping of the commandments and the daily doing of the will of God as that will becomes known to us. The man who wrote that lofty passage which tells us that the Lord requires of us only what we can all give, was combating the pestilent heresy that God can be approached only through the extravagant gift. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born

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for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" To have given rivers of oil would have made an immense spectacle, to have sacrificed the first born would have produced a deep impression. The approach which the Lord desired in Micah's time and the approach which He requires to-day is inner—placing heavy demands upon the inner resources, but after all only such demands as the least of men can meet. In both the inner and the outer worlds the call to-day is for strenuous warfare, but the service in the warfare is just such service as each can render. A great general used to say that the campaigns are always won by the man who gets to a strategic spot first with the most men. The war is won in other words by the marchers, and marching is walking after all. The bands indeed play for a while and the banners flaunt themselves in the breeze, but presently the music

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dies out, the flag droops through the weariness of the bearer, and the march becomes plain walking—walking through the rain or snow or mud or heat. Still the campaign is won by just such dreary drudging. The warfare of Christianity is accomplished in the same prosaic fashion. A militant Christianity means a Christianity willing to do faithfully the ordinary things which any one can do. There are indeed great strategic centers to be captured—cities and rural districts and foreign lands. Yet these are to be won by reaching them first with the most men—men, who by the very fact that they are occupying the field prevent its falling into the enemy's hands. Yet there may be no brilliant charges or theatric repulses in this warfare.

A splendid passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews tells of the long line of God's heroes—those who wrought righteousness, subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions. The writer goes on to picture these heroes as surrounding the early Christians, as the spectators in the old Roman games

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surrounded the contestants in the arena from the seats of the galleries. The writer would encourage the runners in the Christian race by having them feel that the race is run before a vast audience of onlookers who have themselves run the race. What is the call that he sounds to the runners? To gather themselves together with a mighty grasp on themselves and to fly toward the goal with a gigantic spurt of energy? The call is indeed to run, but not with a frantic burst of speed, not with a sensational and thrilling effort to touch the goal with a leap. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus. . . ."

Looking unto Jesus. The power of the life of Jesus is that with every utterance of belief in the greatness of the work to which He had been called He went farther down into a lowly service. We could not if we

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would strip the extraordinary from the life of Jesus. We must not strip the ordinary from His life. The Scriptural meaning of incarnation has indeed its fathomless mysteries, but one truth about incarnation is made clear to us with unmistakable certainty in every book of the New Testament. Incarnation means the assumption of the ordinary duties of ordinary life. It means going about doing good. It means walking through all the round of human duties. It means the sanctification of the ordinary with a divine purpose. It means the use of the ordinary as a revelation of God. So the Word was made flesh. The Word came not on wings as a flying angel and not as a breathless messenger running to herald a king, but as a Companion of men, walking with them through the ordinary pathways of ordinary life.

VI
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“And the first came before Him saying, Lord, Thy pound hath made ten pounds more.”—Luke 19: 16.

THE text before us may easily be used to teach a lesson of Christian daring. The man who with one pound made ten pounds, gained a thousand per cent. The passage implies the right kind of daring. There is a sort of headlong recklessness which with many persons passes as daring, but that is not the daring of the winner of the ten pounds. It is possible to be ignorantly bold without disaster if we confine ourselves merely to speech. In a land which gives all conceivable liberty to utterance, any man may say about what he pleases with no great harm except to the opinion in which he is held by intelligent persons. In the financial realm, on the contrary, boldness must be

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intelligent or it comes quickly to grief. The text is of value because it assumes intelligence at the very start. The thought is of a keen mind daring to act boldly.

We live in a day which severely criticises the man venturesome in financial enterprises. There is altogether too much reason and ground for the criticism. Men have been bold with money which has not been their own, and which was not put into their hands to be bold with. The law rightly insists that it is a crime to be bold with trust funds. To try to make a thousand per cent with trust funds is a crime, and the crime would not be less a crime if the adventurer should be successful. The manager of trust funds must stick to the four per cents. He has in his hands the welfare of widows and orphans, and he must not take the risk.

The situation is far otherwise with another type of financial leader. Suppose a man has money of his own with which he feels free to run a risk. Suppose that he himself is the only one who will suffer in

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case of failure. Or suppose the money has been put into his hands with the express purpose of his taking a risk with it. Even here he can act illegitimately. He can use the money for a gambling speculation. He can give himself to deals which mean nothing of value to the community. But on the other hand, he can take a risk which means much to society. He may risk money to build a railroad which the community needs. Or he may anticipate the currents which make for the location of cities, and he may seek wisely to direct these currents. If we were to strike out from our modern industrial life all the benefits which have been gained as bold men have risked their last dollar on enterprises which to others than the leaders themselves seemed hopelessly foolish, we should have very little left. We live in a time which seems to sweep rapidly toward increased control by the people themselves over industrial enterprises. The success of such control will largely depend upon the affirmative answer as to whether the masses

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of the people can be brought to take intelligent risks. Up to the present the great ventures have been made chiefly by individuals. The world is immensely indebted to some leaders who went forth seeking a thousand per cent. If it is permissible at times for a man to risk his life, it is certainly permissible at times for a man to risk his money. If a soldier may give one life that a thousand lives may be happy, the honest financier may risk one dollar that ten may be drawn into useful investment. The Gospels are full of the duty of risk taking. We need only to recur to the Master's favorite illustration of the Word of God as seed to recognize the importance of risk taking in His conception of the Kingdom. The farmer goes forth at the proper season with grain which is precious, and scatters the seed upon the ground. He runs a risk. The rains may not fall. The seed may be blighted. Yet the Master always insisted that the true method is the method of risk-running. The man who saves his life loses it, and the man who loses his life saves it.

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There are in the Gospels some incidents of interesting personal contacts between Jesus and various persons where the favor of Jesus seems to have been won by the very boldness of the petitioner. There is, for example, the story of the Syrophenician woman who came beseeching a cure for her daughter. The Master seems to have met the woman with stern rebuff. The woman was an outsider, that is to say, an outsider to His immediate purposes, and Jesus told her that He must not take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. The woman thought of the Master as having extraordinary power. She held Him in reverence approaching awe. And yet she would not be rebuffed even by Him. Quick as a flash came back her reply that even dogs were allowed to eat of the crumbs which might fall from the table. Her request was granted because of "the saying," that is, because of the faith which made her bold after rebuff. To take a further illustration, it would seem that the Master's fondness for Peter was due to the very qualities in Peter

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which were responsible for Peter's mistakes. Peter was willing to run risks. At one time, indeed, his boldness made him a mouthpiece of Satan, but at another time the same boldness led to the Master's word that Peter had been the mouthpiece of God.

If we can carry out the suggestiveness of the Master's parable we may say that the Kingdom of God is not always the kingdom of the four per cent increase. There are, indeed, some trusts so sacred that no risk is to be run with them. But assuming that the disciple has reasonable intelligence, there are aspects of the Kingdom which come under the law of the thousand per cent increase, and this through taking a risk. We speak much of Christian experience and of the power which comes through experience. Experience in the Christian life is like experience elsewhere. We come to power as we trust ourselves, and the power increases with amazing rapidity. The business man often tries to tell the world the secret of his success, but beyond a few formal rules he tells nothing.

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The real secret is something which he can not put into exact phrase if he tries. The truth is that he has come to a sort of knack which is the outcome of experience. He has taken risks till he feels at home with the risks. He feels at home even in uncharted seas. He can not succeed without this spirit of daring faith. Similarly with the artist. He can not put into speech more than formal rules for success. He has developed taste which is almost as unerring as an instinct, and he has developed taste through the exercise of taste. He feels sure of his judgments. So also with the moral sense which marks the man of conscience. If this sense is at all vital and growing, it runs ahead of the rules. It gives itself more and more to obedience to its highest instincts, and the growth is at the rate of the thousand per cent. Christian experience is knack and taste and conscience. It is the feeling of awareness which the life attains unto as it trusts itself more and more to its own highest moments. There is no greater mistake than to imagine that in

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its inner springs the life moves according to schedule or to rules. This would not be a life of faith. As we shall see later, the life fashions for itself statements as the outgrowth of experience, but at the center is this willingness to venture upon something which may not be formulated. In the presence of an alternative absolutely new the Christian life yields to the impulse in one direction, rather than to the other. Of course mistake is possible. The formal reasons are often with the course that is not taken. The path of safety may seem to be with the course from which the Christian turns. Yet the Kingdom has many times gone forward with the man who felt in spite of the formal reasons that the duty lay in a direction which seemed to others to promise nothing but disaster. We have high authority for the truth that the way which leads to life is not always the most promising outwardly. The way is straight and narrow, and few there be that find it. The broad way would seem to have the apparent reasons in its favor, but it has one

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fatal fault. It gets to the wrong place, and roads are justified by what they bring us to.

We would not, however, have it imagined that we would disparage the place of thought in Christian experience. Only—the thought is not always or even often of the hard-and-fast formal type. The complaint is often brought against the systems of Christian doctrine that there is so much more in the conclusion than there is in the premises. The criticism is true, but should not be held as a criticism. The difficulty is with logic. Logic knows nothing of thousand per cent gains. Logic sticks to the four per cents. And where the Christian system is exposed to the onslaughts of the thinker who really does not think at all, but who simply affirms without any basis in reason, logic is like the remorseless examining instruments of the banker who is dealing with trust funds. But we must never forget that after all Christian thought is alive and growing, and that the test of the worth of successive conceptions is as to

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whether they show the thousand per cent increase over what has gone before. The progress of Christian thinking is like the progress of scientific thinking. While we know that science depends upon instruments of precision and will labor through the years for a more exactly made tool, we know also that the true scientist is always laying stress on what he calls the scientific imagination. The leader in science moves not so much by carefully taken steps as by long leaps and bounds. He gets a glimpse of a new truth, and leaves it to those who come after to work the truth out into careful statement. He announces a particular hypothesis because the fact points that way—not because the facts in all cases completely prove the hypothesis. The epoch-making conceptions are announced long before they are proved. Scientists like Newton and Darwin and Pasteur are men who have made one pound into ten, or who have worked under the obligation of the thousand per cent increase.

How are we to tell whether we are on the

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path to truth or not in our idea of God? One rule is to inquire whether the conception to which we attain with the passing of the years is on the whole an advance over the old. Is the new conception ten pounds as compared with the one pound of the old? Men of other times held a conception of God which made Him a feudal lord. Then they thought of Him as moral governor busy with constitutional expedients for the salvation of His laws rather than of the men who lived under the laws. This thought, however, was a thousand per cent increase over the older feudal idea. Then we had the thought of God as holy love, and this was tenfold better than the conventional statements of God as a moral governor. In our own time we hold fast to all the good in the older statements, but we think of the holiness and love of God in terms of Fatherhood, making the abstract ideas glow with personal meaning. And this last is a gain over all that has gone before. As the sense of personal worth increases in men, as the idea of moral life expands in

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richness, we shall add to our thought of God. The main obligation is always one of increase.

We ask the same question of our thought of Christ. On the whole, are we left richer or poorer with changing conceptions? If a new doctrine leaves us poorer, we may be surer that we are off the path of the truth. Do the Scriptures mean more or less to us with the changing conceptions? This is the essential test. Of course, the man in whose hand the pound remained just a pound received rebuke, and of course the man in whose hands Christian thought remains just one pound receives rebuke, but the question is as to whether the change has been really in the line of daring. It is a curious fact that many persons feel that a man's boldness of belief is shown by his believing a minimum. The little belief about God and His revelations is sometimes looked upon as the sign of daring, but the radicalism is really with the man who believes the most. Suppose a man should start out to believe not the most but the

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least about his fellow-men. Suppose instead of assuming that men are ordinarily to be depended upon he should take the ground that they are only to be depended upon in so far as they show in advance that they are reliable. Could we say that such a man would be an especially daring man in any worthy sense? Would he not be a more daring man who would believe in men absolutely in spite of the occasional embarrassments in which such a belief might place him? Who is the more daring man, the man who believes the most about the world in which he lives or the least? What would we say of the man who in relation to his world of men and of things would make his boast that he believed the least possible concerning that world? There are many advantages about a short creed, but only in case the creed is positive. One or two mighty and dynamic affirmations may be enough for any one of us to believe, but a creed made of negations is of no great value whether it be short or long. A favorite illustration with a certain type of critic of

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beliefs is that he dares to put to sea in the few facts to which he can hold, unconcerned if these views give him hardly the protection which a raft might afford. On occasion, the man who puts to sea in a raft is to be commended as a model of daring, but on the whole, the greater daring is on the part of him who undertakes to pilot a massive steamship across the seas. The one man believes merely that logs will float; the other that iron and steel can be floated and can be made to carry weight by the thousands of tons. Which is the worthier faith? Which is the higher daring?

In any really intelligent mind faith is an achievement. It is not a foolish reliance upon the system of things without reason or reflection. It is rather a manifestation of powers at a high pitch. It is more than a mere holding fast of views delivered unto us by those who have gone before. The only way we can prove fit descendants of those who bequeathed their beliefs to us is to do as they did in their day, namely, to invest our beliefs in life and thought, look-

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ing for a large return. Their effort to hand beliefs on to us was itself in the nature of an investment. The beliefs which they bequeathed to us come as a stimulus to faith.

Faith, then, is the forward reaching or the forward stretching of the life. As the life grows, the thought must also inevitably grow. The belief is in a sense the instrument of the life, or is the nourishment upon which the life feeds. We might as well talk about striving to feed our bodies on a minimum, as to feed our spiritual lives on a minimum. What the life consumes as belief works its way into the organism and comes forth as larger belief. We can tell the size of the life by the size of the belief upon which it lives. We can tell the capacity of the life by the belief which is its outgrowth. Or to come back to the words of the parable, we can tell the vigor of the investor by his willingness to make a venture. If he is content to guard the faith which has come to him without any attempt to increase that faith, we may say indeed

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that he has his place in the Kingdom of God, but that his place is not the most important. The gospel is an appeal to the imagination of men, but the imagination is the daring power. We speak of flights of imagination, and place the imagination in a more dignified realm than the power of logic. No one talks of flights of logic. Christianity is the power of spiritual flight. And when we say this we think of flight not as a wild lunging upward toward the skies, to be followed by catastrophe. We think of the fine balance of powers by which flight is made secure, and then we think of that daring which trusts the air and the pinion. The Christian conception of God is a triumph of daring. The idea that God cares for men has been reached not by careful scrutiny of facts, but in spite of many facts. Men have dared to trust God when the appearances have been against God, and trusting, have found themselves nourished into larger life. The Christian thought of God has been reached by lofty spiritual flights.

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It is time to speak of those more practical fields in which the spirit of Christian daring is to show itself. We may find some who would think that the sphere of Christian thinking is already full of bold enough spirits. We could hardly find any one who would deny the need of increased daring in the field of practical endeavor. The whole world is to-day full of a spirit of romantic daring, and the call is for the soldiers of the Kingdom to have something of the same daring.

There is abundant sign that the Kingdom is not wanting in this boldness. We may take the efforts at the redemption of men from evil. The true worker in the Kingdom moves into the forsaken quarter of the city, it may be, with the assumption that any human soul has in it powers of recuperation which make the soul worth working for. No matter how far the life has gone toward evil, the message of Christianity is that there is yet hope. As long as the man is within our reach he is a legitimate object of Christian endeavor. This

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is not folly. It is no more foolish than the thought of the modern physician or surgeon, that as long as a patient is alive there is a chance for him. Nor does it take a light and frivolous view of sin. There never has been a time when the evil of sin appeared more dreadful than to-day, and yet the effort to bring men out of evil is based upon the belief in the marvelous recuperative and productive powers of a life when once it has been reclaimed. The very fact that the swamp land can produce a mass of tangled bushes is a sign that it can be made wheat-bearing if it can be drained. The modern worker in the Kingdom goes forth to drain submerged lives simply because he believes in a thousand per cent increase.

Another mark of the heroism of our day is the attempt of the Kingdom to capture the growing life of childhood and youth. That old thought that it was necessary for the young life to depart into evil before knowing good—how far away it seems! We believe that from the beginning the life

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can give itself to the normal activities of the Kingdom of God. There are, we know, some activities now looked upon as legitimate which were once looked upon as sinful. We permit the youth to breathe a freer air, which he could once breathe only by stealth. All this aside, however. The fact remains that the Christian Kingdom proceeds on the bold assumption that the forces of evil can be defeated from the very start. If this is boldness, it is just the same sort of boldness which moves school teachers out year after year to capture the growing youth for the kingdom of intelligence.

Then there is the large life of society which the prophets tell us must be made to show forth the glory of God. Can there be anything bolder than the purpose of making material and political and social laws the manifestations of the Divine purpose? This seems very bold until we consider how far we have come and think of the revolutions which have been wrought as men have dared to trust the gospel of Jesus. The

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Kingdom always has been bold. No one of the projects discussed for the relief of men and the bringing in of God is bolder than some which have been successfully undertaken in the past. For example, think of that act of faith in God and men when daring souls brought the Scriptures for the first time within reach of the ordinary understanding. The printing of the Book was attended with danger. The people were not skilled in reading, and all sorts of misunderstandings and even of personal calamities were theoretically and in some cases actually possible. Yet the total outcome was mighty vindication of the heroism. The entrusting of power to men in the name of the gospel is daring, but the daring is a Christian daring. Finally, perhaps the most daring thought of all, we believe that it is possible to bring Christianity to the whole world. By this we do not mean this or that organized form of Christianity, but we do mean the essential message concerning God and man which comes with Christ. Is this daring? Yes—with the same sort of

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daring which Paul showed when he set forth throughout the Roman Empire with a much more hopeless task.

In a word, the defense of the Christian system is the aggressiveness of the life of its believers. Christianity loses its power when it tries merely to hold its own. It must force the fighting or cease to be itself. By the very law of its life it must increase. This is the spirit of its Founder, and the Founder would have us believe that this is the spirit of the God whom He came to reveal. We may without irreverence declare that the spirit of God which is revealed in that cross of Christ which stands at the center of Christianity, is a revelation of spiritual daring. We do not pretend to fathom the mystery of the divine feeling, but we do believe that the cross stands as the expression of faith in men, and of willingness to venture upon that faith. That men should believe in God would seem to call for faith. That God should believe in men would seem to call for even more faith.

Returning once more to the parable, we

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can imagine the outcry that a certain type of mind would make at the proposal to place a man who had made ten pounds from one at the head of ten cities. This reckless, plunging fellow! How will it be safe to let him take hold of the cities? Will he not bankrupt the cities? Will not his clamor always be for more taxes that he may build larger walls? Is not the path of safety with the man who would take no risk—who was so careful against making mistake that he wrapped his Lord's money in a napkin and hid it in the earth? This man knew that banks go to destruction, that traders do not fulfill their contracts, and he took the absolutely safe course. He did not make anything, but he did not lose anything. Nevertheless the man who made the ten pounds goes to rule over the cities. He did with the money what he was expected to do. And quite likely the cities were better off under his protection than with a more careful man, for if there was fighting to be done this man would force the fighting. The citizens would probably never see

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armies drawn up in siege against their own fortresses. The leader would be carrying on a siege elsewhere. In any case, this is the true defense for the cities of God—to put over them the aggressive and venturesome, who will range far afield to bring back glories for their Lord. The Kingdom of God abides through the daring of its citizens. They know that there is more glory in losing all while trying to do something, than in saving all while attempting nothing.

VII

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPIRITUAL
CRISIS

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPIRITUAL CRISIS

“And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”—Gen. 32: 26.

THE story of the struggle of Jacob in the passage before us is a classic statement of the significance of spiritual crisis. The return of Jacob after the long interval which had passed since he had deceived his father and defrauded his brother, the fateful thoughts which surged through his mind on that evening when he heard that Esau was in front of him to meet him on the morrow, the struggle through the night hours—all this is told with imperishable charm. The skill of the narrative would of itself keep it alive, but there are other and deeper reasons for our cherishing the passage. Here is one of those stories which have so much of

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life in them that they might have been written yesterday. They are true not merely to the experience of a particular individual or of a particular time, but true of multitudes of individuals and of all times. The picture is of the struggle through which the soul passes when the spiritual forces come quickly to a crisis, and issues for the entire after life must be settled before day-break.

In any consideration of spiritual crisis we must walk circumspectly. It is easy for us so to treat a crisis as to make the ordinary every day experience seem of slight value in comparison. We may even mislead ourselves into supposing that crisis is to be sought for on its own account. We are in danger also of estimating the value of a crisis by the emotion which it arouses. We may forget the connection between bodily states and spiritual states and attribute over-importance to that which may have in itself chiefly a bodily significance. We are not in danger, however, of making such mistake in considering the story of

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Jacob. Sometimes, too, we are led out of ourselves into what seems an important crisis by what is known as crowd contagion. If we let this old time story be our teacher we shall not make this mistake. The writer of the narrative is not picturing the extravagant effects which crowd suggestion may produce on an excited mind. The language of the story is a language of another day, but the meaning is intelligible enough. For various reasons we may sometimes take the mere ebb and flow of emotional life, as it moves along with its peculiar rythm, to be more important than it is, but not so here. Here we see a man in a struggle which means life or death.

We are confronted with the same problem in studying the crisis in the life of an individual as that with which we have to deal in the life of a nation. Nations are subject to crises of widely varying degrees of importance. An altogether trifling cause may now and again call forth the most exaggerated manifestations of public opinion. The wise statesman simply deals with these

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by leaving them alone, or, as he says, by allowing them to "blow over." Violent as they seem to the ordinary onlooker, they are after all but mere gusts and will soon exhaust themselves. There are, however, crises of a different order—crises like those of our nation in the days from '61 to '65, for example, when in a few brief months the nation had to settle issues which were to affect the welfare of democracy forever. In such crisis the very depths of national strength or weakness are laid bare and lessons of imperishable value may be learned. So the student in politics or economics or finance or law, or in any field which has to do with national vitality, can find these four years full of instruction. Thus also in the lives of individuals some crises are of such moment that the study of the crisis becomes of surpassing importance.

The first mark of an important crisis is that it is the culmination of forces which have been at work through a long period. Jesus once spoke a parable concerning the likeness of the Kingdom of God to a field

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growing toward the harvest. The farmer plants the seed and then leaves it to the forces of nature. He gives himself to other tasks, and the seed springs upward toward the light and grows, the farmer knoweth not how and apparently careth not how. But in a few swift days the harvest time comes, and immediately he putteth in his sickle, because the time of harvest is come. There is in the last few days of harvest the swift culmination of forces which have been working through the months. If the farmer is not alert in those few days the growth of all the months previous goes for nothing. The over-ripe ears spill their treasures upon the earth.

The same tendency to sudden crowning of slow processes by swift processes can be observed in almost every sphere. The head of the business concern lays plans that reach through years and across continents, but these plans lead somewhere to a focus. If the focus is not utilized to the utmost the work of the years goes for nought. The student ponders long over a problem upon

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which he may not for years be able to get any light. Suddenly, without any word of warning and with the most unseemly accompaniments, the solution flashes upon his mind. If we are to believe the story of Newton and the falling apple, we can understand that the patient processes in the mind of the reasoner had reached such a condition that the most ordinary event was likely to give the mind the push toward the final understanding. The college student works long over his problem without intellectual relief. At the last, as he walks the streets, or takes a morning newspaper, the solution flashes upon him. If he is wise he will see that the critical moment in the thinking has not come by chance. He will not in the future dispense with long hours of study over his problems. He knows that the swift insight is the harvest process after the hours of study.

Or suppose we think of the inspiration of the real poet. It may be that the poet can not write until the mood is on him. But that does not mean that the intervals

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between the moods are passed in idleness. They are rather passed in patient brooding. The inspiration, when it does come, is not the sportive play of chance, but the fine flowering out of long meditations. There are two rules which the scholar, the thinker, the poet must learn to observe—first, to give himself to long brooding when to the onlooker he may seem to be accomplishing little or nothing; second, he must know how to utilize to the utmost the days of spiritual harvest. In the inner movements of religious experience crisis has the same sort of meaning. It may be the mere passing emotional stir of the moment, or it may be the profound event of an entire career. All depends upon what has gone before the crisis. Ten days in harvest time are of immense importance,—if they have been preceded by two hundred and fifty days of growth. Of what is the crisis the outcome? This is the question.

In the passage before us the crisis was the outcome of twenty years of ripening. Jacob, according to the story, was one of

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those characters who have to battle between the higher and the lower. There were two men in him. The one was the crafty deceiver, the man winning his way to advancement by the exercise of shrewd wit; and there was a higher, more princely character, the possible prevailer with God. There was no way of artificially tearing these two characters apart. A mere resolution during those years of sojourn away from the land of his birth would have accomplished nothing. There was needed the slow ripening of the years, the slow growth toward moral firmness, the expansion of mind and heart toward loftier life. Our Lord's parable of the wheat and the tares finds something of application to individual experience as well as to the progress of the Christian community. It is at first hard to tell just how to eliminate the tares from the human life. Certainly it is hard to pull up tares before the tares have revealed themselves as such. Now we are not for a moment to encourage any sort of easy-going indulgence with ourselves, but we are also to admit

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this, that it is easiest to deal with a problem of eliminating evil from a human life when the realization of the seriousness of a moral crisis is upon the mind of the man. Jacob had indeed not dealt seriously enough with himself at the very start, but it required the desperate urgency of a crisis to bring him face to face with the problem of his personal spiritual welfare. Jacob was tare, and Israel was wheat—to speak in the words of the parable. The tare had grown to strength, and the wheat was pushing also toward the harvest. The question was as to which was henceforth to claim the field. The life could no longer be divided. It must become all one thing or all the other. This was the meaning of the real struggle by the brook Jabbok. Was Jacob to be Jacob, or was he to become Israel? His struggle was with God, or with the larger and better self which was henceforth to be everything or nothing. In the night hours Jacob looked through his past life. The presence of Esau just across the brook carried his mind back to the early deception, to

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the memories of home life, to the worldly prosperity which had come with the years. And there came also the thought of the stirrings of higher life which had been part of his experience through the years. He knew that events had focused in his life. He knew that it was then or never. And he laid hold upon his better and higher self, upon God. He struggled through the night till the blush in the east which told of the break of day. He held fast that elusive power with a cry and would not let him go till the reward had come. Jacob recognized the crisis in its relation to the days gone. He knew that the years were wrestling in the battle of the hours.

A spiritual crisis of real meaning, then, is one which is a culmination of a process of growth moving toward a harvest. We stand beside the struggling characters in the story and see how definite the struggle becomes. The lips break forth into definite petition. We have in the story an illustration of intense prayer which the saints are not willing to allow to drop from the list of

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religious classics. We hear to-day much of the doctrine that prayer after all is but the conduct of a life. We ought most heartily to subscribe to the doctrine that prayer is the conduct of a life, but the prayer of the soul at a crisis comes spontaneously to definite articulation and expression. Life never is really focused until it finds expression in speech. We believe that the utterance of a soul in prayer is of little value if the utterance is merely the formal repetition of phrases or if the words move mechanically through a fixed routine. We can see that prayer is but little more than mockery if the conduct of the life is at a remove from the words of the lips. But what of prayer like this of Jacob? What of prayer as the utterance of life moved to the depths? What of prayer as a breaking forth of a life which has back of it the pressure of the years? The more there is back of any utterance, the more definite it becomes. The more the mind has thought, the easier it is to speak. Here, then, is no hazy dreaming. Here is no

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aimless drifting of mind. Here is a soul at a crisis with the forces so sharpened to a point that the words come likewise to point and force.

We notice that the prayer which arises out of crisis like this by the brook Jabbok runs in a deep channel. There is nothing frivolous in the thirty-third chapter of Genesis. Jacob is confronted by a physical peril, to be sure. The outraged brother is just across the brook. Jacob is encumbered with women and children and flocks and herds. There is no telling what the morrow will bring forth. This prayer, however, though the crisis may have been forced at the last by Jacob's anxiety, speedily gets away from all worry over imminent battle with Esau. The struggle assumes quickly vaster proportions, and the wrestler finds that he is confronted by God. The prayer is not for relief upon the morrow, not for military wisdom and prowess in the fighters, not for physical deliverance of any kind. The petition goes into depths below all this and asks after the name of the power with

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which the wrestler contends. "Tell me thy name."

Now, we may put into these words a limited significance if we wish. We all freely recognize that the story is told in the language of another day, and that the prayer is a petition of a time which did not have the loftiest spiritual conceptions, a time whose thought of God was far from perfect. We may admit the inferiority of the religious notions of him who gave us this story of the wrestle for a blessing. No matter what the thought of the value of learning the name of the wrestler in this struggle which is so desperate that Jacob feels that he has a visitor from God in his grasp. No matter if we would to-day think of a struggle like this as a struggle between that lower in man which comes from selfishness of will and that higher which comes from the will of God. The writer, with profound understanding of the human heart, makes an inquiry as to the name of the visitant the climax of the struggle. And that climax is true to human life. Who is God and what

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does He mean? How are we to think of Him—as impersonal force or as mind like ourselves? Does His life feel distresses like ours? What is the purpose of His will? Does He care for us? These are the questions which go to the depths, and these are raised not merely by philosophers and theologians. They are raised by human lives face to face with some mighty issue which has arisen in time of crisis. The question as to the name of the Heavenly Force is not the question of the scholar or of the recluse merely, but the question of Jacob as he tarried after the rest of his company had passed over Jabbok with the flock. The answer, too, oddly enough, puts at least in symbol the answer to the inquiries of all the ages as to the nature of the Divine. Men cry out for an understanding of God, and the reply is not a name for God at all, but a new name for men. God revealed Himself to Jacob by making Jacob Israel. And that is the only answer which is intelligible. We can not form to ourselves satisfactory definitions of God. If such are

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attempted they soon prove purely formal. The only definition which helps is no definition at all. It is a human life constantly touching the centers of divine power, and by those centers rising into newness of life. God is known in the effects which He produces. When it was said that God was the God of Israel, any one could see that God was defined in the very fact that He had made Israel the prince. The answer to prayer is not so much the definite reply to a specific petition, as it is a new name for the man who prays. If prayer is powerful enough to make Jacob over into Israel, the prayer has enough efficacy to be accounted one of the great world forces. According to the man who wrote this passage Israel was, in what he became through the presence of God in his life, one of the agents for the uplifting of the world. The power which transformed Jacob was no ordinary power. So the name of Israel is the answer to Jacob's cry for the name of the Divine Visitant. The God reached in struggle is just the God whom we can build into our

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lives. This is the story of the upward movement of the seers and saints. They call out for more of God, and the answer is just that measure of divine life which God can make part of their lives. The man who prays comes to himself to be the answer to his own prayer. He may not himself see the transformation, but the life which moves toward God as did the life in this desperate conflict, becomes of itself the revelation of God to the world.

We see now that this struggle is to be conceived of in terms of will. It is no passive hour of fancy. We are not moving in the region of dreams. Crisis is not crisis until it lays hold of the will. We can find a contrast between the experience recorded here and an experience told us as having a place in the earlier life of this same hero. It will be remembered that when Jacob went forth from his father's house he lay down in his path at the end of the first stage in his journey and dreamed a beautiful dream. He saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, and the angels of God

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ascending and descending. God was only a ladder-length away. In the morning Jacob awoke and placed a stone to mark the spot, for the nearness of God had been made known to him. We can hardly say, however, that Jacob made any very determined effort to reach the God at the top of the ladder. Outside of a pledge which revealed more of the Jacob nature than of the Israel nature, the experience was just a pleasant dream.

Observe the contrast with the struggle by the brook. This is no dream, but an opened-eyed grapple. This is no beautiful picture to be cherished for its own delightful memory. God is not at the top of the ladder, but on the ground. There is no thought now of shrewd bargaining. There wrestled a Man with him till the breaking of the day.

If we wished a word that would characterize for us the desperation of determined will grapple, what better word could we find than just this word "wrestle?" Here is no opportunity for careful and crafty

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planning. Here is no chance for cool strategem. Here is the least possible opportunity for Jacob, and the greatest chance for Israel. The religious crisis, in other words, definite as may be the petition with which the crisis finds expression, is just a determined holding on till the light breaks. The scholar may find solution for the problem which torments him with its mystery not by carefully reasoned steps of argument, but by a deliberate and determined holding on, a simple keeping of the problem before the attention. We are not to think of will power as manifested merely by the progress which the life seems to make at the instant. We are not to make the mistake of imagining that great will force shows itself in the power to "do things." Fully as important is the grim power to hold on. There are some states in experience in which the life shows its faithfulness by a certain locked or set condition of the will. For the moral kingdom the will is just as important at that still moment as when it seems to be bustling with activity. The

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men who have set their wills against injustice in the world even when a protest could accomplish nothing, and have gone to death rather than yield by a hair's breadth from the protest, the men who have locked their wills with fixedness toward the good things of the spirit which were beyond their reach—how poor the world would be without the memory of such! This was the wrestle of Jacob—at the supreme crisis of his life he would not let the struggle cease even at the breaking day. The light began to break across the plains, the cattle began to stir with the freshening of the morning breeze, the uneasy slumbers of the men gave way to quick alertness in the presence of the foe on the other side of the brook, ere Jacob knew that he had passed from Jacob to Israel.

What was the outcome? Crisis has to be judged from its outcome. The crisis that leaves everything just what it was before is not a crisis of the kind we are considering. Mere emotional upheavals that leave the man afterward just what he

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was before are of no consequence. By their fruits we shall know them—this is the final test of all religious experiences.

The consequence first of all was Israel. Imagine the amazement which must have fallen on the members of the band when they saw their leader next morning, halting upon his thigh. Imagine their surprise as he started toward the front. They would have looked for some keen strategy as a result of the sleeplessness of their leader. In the morning, however, he went straight forward to meet with his brother. The old roundaboutness was gone. Here was a new man, a leader moving on the straight line, as the worthy leader always moves. What are tricks of brilliant maneuver compared with the power to move straight ahead? The feet of Israel halted, but his mind halted not.

And Israel saw the face of his brother Esau as one seeth the face of God. There was something in the appearance of Jacob which melted the heart of Esau. What had begun as a campaign of enemies ended as

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a meeting of brothers. The transformed life looked upon Esau from a new viewpoint, and the changed expression softened the wrath of Esau. This same divine strategy is one day to bring in the Kingdom of God, the strategy of the straight-forward meeting of man and man after the wrestle with the Divine. Let once the better man shine forth, let Jacob be overcome of Israel, and the hearts of other men break into charity. A curious story this, and yet full even of poetic suggestiveness. The last thought which Esau had held of Jacob was of the day when Jacob had wrought a transformation in his appearance. With a skin of a kid Jacob had deceived his father. He had imitated Esau. Behold, when Esau again sees Jacob another transformation! This time the transformation not through deceit, but through righteousness!

The sun rose on him, the narrator tells us. Quite likely the first time the sun had really risen on him. The new day had dawned.

We end somewhat as we began. To

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get at the meaning of spiritual crisis we must ask many questions. Out of what does the crisis come? How far down into the depths does it move? Deep enough to touch and hold the will? What comes out of it? A merely pleasant memory to be told around the light of the evening camp? If this is all the crisis is of no value. If, on the other hand, it arises as the culmination of forces which have wrought like the movement of a tree toward its ripening, if it sinks by its sheer weight down into that depth where the purposes of men abide, if it issues in a transformation of Jacob into Israel, the crisis is indeed a visitation from on high. It starts men forward to world leadership. They pass across Jabbok new men, moving straight-forward, and upon them and upon the world which they are to lead the sun rises.

VIII
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“But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him!”
—Matthew 25: 6.

THIS parable is one of several enforcing substantially the same lesson. The Master wished His disciples to understand that the Kingdom of God would be a longer time in coming than they would imagine. He uttered a parable about a faithless servant who began to eat and drink with the drunken because his lord, gone into a far country, delayed his return. He said also that if the goodman of the house had known in what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken into. The thief came after the goodman thought it was too late to expect him. In the parable before us the bridegroom came at midnight,

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at the last possible moment, at least so far as that particular day was concerned.

It is a misunderstanding of these parables to take them as if they were intended to teach that the Kingdom is to come unexpectedly soon. It is easy to see how such misunderstanding has arisen. We have been misled by the suddenness of the coming. Sudden does not mean soon. Jesus does indeed allow us to think that the Kingdom comes suddenly, but the suddenness is like the swift ripening of the harvest after the long days of growth. The Master would have His disciples know that the great strain on the faith of His followers is to come through apparently unreasonable delays. Who is less likely to be late than a bridegroom? Who is less excusable for delay than a bridegroom? Yet the bridegroom in the parable came at the last moment.

Christianity has shown its vitality very strikingly in its power to adjust itself to the disappointment which comes through those deferred hopes which so often make

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the heart sick. The disappointment began early. The disciples were constantly asking the Master how soon the Kingdom in its fullness would appear. The Master had a truer sense of reality than His disciples, and knew of possible delays. Hence these repeated warnings that the Kingdom of God and the God of the Kingdom would be delayed. The early history of the Church shows how sorely needed the warnings were. The disciples hoped against hope that the Lord would soon return to begin a blessed reign on earth, yet they bravely adjusted themselves to the repeated delays, remembering always how their Lord had warned them. How pathetic is that incident near the close of the Fourth Gospel where the writer seeks to make it very clear that Jesus did not say that a beloved disciple should tarry till the great coming, but that if Jesus willed that that disciple should tarry till the coming, another disciple should attend to his own duty.

It is possible so to read Paul's epistles as to see in them the repeated adjustments to

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the thought of a delayed coming of Christ. When Paul first goes to his work it is with the expectation that the time will be short. Later the insight dawns that the day of the coming has been far postponed. In the early centuries the fathers cherished the same vanishing hope, until finally the truth dawned that the real comings of the Kingdom are spiritual comings. For most of us the problem which perplexed the early Christian causes no trouble, for the simple reason that the problem, in the form which it took for them, does not exist for us.

In another form, however, the problem does exist for us. The fact that we no longer think of an earthly kingdom patterned according to the apostolic dreams has not altogether cleared up the difficulties. Spiritual kingdoms, too, are late in coming. The Master's parable has important meaning for us to-day.

There is a sense in which the expectation that God will come quickly in repeated revelations seems like the very worthiest type of faith. Is it not a reflection on God

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to think of Him as delaying? The foolish virgins in the story might have represented themselves as having more faith in the bridegroom than their sisters who took the larger supply of oil. They might have reproached their sisters with reflecting on the bridegroom. They might have thought of themselves as really honoring the bridegroom by the smallness of their supply of oil. "We have taken but little oil," they might have said, "because we believe in him." In essentially the same way some minds have through all the ages sought to show their faith in God. It can not be true to Him to teach that He may be long delayed. Is it not the higher faith to believe that He will come quickly? Yet against the foolish ones in the story the door was shut. And against those who hold the scant supplies of oil in our day the doors are likewise shut.

The difficulty with some religious conceptions is not that they are not logical or not true. The difficulty is that they are not large enough. Quite likely the oil of the

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foolish in the parable was good enough considered as oil. The fatal objection was that there was not enough of it. It burned out. The fatal objection to the religious conceptions with which some go forth to meet the Kingdom is not that the conceptions are false. They are true as far as they go, but they do not go far enough. The Kingdom is delayed, and these views burn out before midnight.

Many of us have heard emphasis placed upon the thought of the life beyond this as pre-eminently the life of the Kingdom of God. The thought of the life here has been simply that of preparation for the life beyond. We have heard stress put upon the fact that we may find ourselves in that other realm much sooner than we had expected. Death may come at any time. At any time the cry may arise that the Bridegroom cometh and that we are to go forth to meet Him. Now, the difficulty with this conception is not that it is not true. The difficulty is rather that there is not enough of the view. It runs short, like the scanty supply

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of oil in the parable. It is well for a young man to go forth with a due sense of the uncertainty of the present life, and with the thought that the present life is not all. But many live on and unavoidably become engrossed in the present life. If now there is no place in their thought for long service of God here and now their belief is apt to burn out, and they themselves may come to the end of a long life without much supply of oil in their vessels. The view that would disparage earthly existence in contrast to heavenly existence has always seemed to some minds to have most of honor for the Almighty, but the honor is of the same sort as that which the virgins in the parable rendered the bridegroom by taking a small supply of oil. Granted that the earth is full of difficulties and inadequacies as compared with some more ideal existence, the true faith would seem to be that which puts the best construction on the present system of things and aims to make the best use of it. We are coming to see this so clearly that we more and more take the present

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order of things into the divine plan and prepare ourselves for the longest possible stay here. We see no reflection on the bridegroom in the large supply of oil. The larger view does not burn out.

Or we take the thought often advanced that the Kingdom of God comes by crisis. The seeker for the Kingdom is encouraged to expect an instantaneous bursting of the light upon his mind. Here again the difficulty is not that the view is false. We have already considered together the significance of spiritual crisis, but we must be on our guard against the thought of crisis as necessarily coming soon. It may not come at all in the form in which we have been led to expect. The Kingdom of God is always near unto us in the sense that it is within the reach of our wills. All we have to do to find God is to turn unto Him. But the coming of the Kingdom in the sense of deeper insight or fuller awareness of the divine intention may be long delayed. Suddenness of crisis may depend upon revulsion of feeling at the realization of evil, or upon

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the sharp focusing of events in the life, or upon temperamental peculiarities. For some insights even the most devout saint must wait for the passing of the years. Here is a life stripped of all the luxuriant foliage of youth. The leaves of the tree are gone. But from the very fact that the leaves are gone it may be possible for the life to see farther. We sometimes can not see the forest for the trees. We can not see the landscape for the trees. With the foliage gone, the great outlines become discernible and the trend of the hills shows itself. To ask why God could not have granted the vision sooner, is like asking why we can not see the clear forms of the hills while the forests are in leaf. The life is too exuberant to see clearly those simplicities which are after all essential. To get back to the thought of the parable, however, we must remember that the view of the Kingdom which lays great stress on the thought of sudden crisis which is just as likely to burst to-morrow as any time, is not large enough. It may burn out before midnight.

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Or we may think of the problem of the coming of the Kingdom through the work of evangelization. Here we come upon a realm which is full of disappointment. We wonder why the world can not be transformed by vast revivals of religion, and we think that we honor God by expecting Him to capture the world soon. Again the difficulty arises not out of the falsity of the view. Revivals of religion have been of immense service, and can always be of service. After a people have become indifferent to righteousness, or have swung away from it, there is often a rhythmic swing back through the preaching of mighty prophets. But if this rhythmic swing back is the only evangelistic force, we may well be discouraged. Our faith will burn out before midnight. There is not oil enough in the conception.

Christianity must never cease to be militant with a certain daring aggressiveness. The very use of the word "militant," however, should help us to remember that most wars are not over when the work of conquest is done. There follows the

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work of colonization—which takes time. There is, of course, a sense in which the conquests of the Kingdom of God are won by dashing onslaught. Evils are to be assailed and overwhelmed by the force of righteousness. This has to do, however, more with the destructive side of religious advance. Evils are to be cast down. But on the other hand, goods are to be set up—and this takes time.

Christianity is not wholly or even in large part a system for policing the world against sin. The kingdoms of this world are to be held for the Kingdom of God not by forces imposed upon aliens from without. The world is to be won as Christians go forth to live in the world, and thus to capture it by colonization. Industry, politics, social life are to be won as Christians make their homes in them. But while a campaign is a matter of weeks, a colonization enterprise requires years and generations. The progress of the Kingdom by colonization is the only view which will not burn out. We need all possible agencies—vast

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campaigns against evil, onslaughts upon corruption, swift raids upon the enemies of God, carrying off converts from evil by storm. But this is not enough. If this is all, discouragement awaits us.

The advance of the Kingdom must be twofold. Men must first be brought to good will. They must will to do the will of God. Then they must be enlightened. Now while it might conceivably be the work of just an instant to bring a man to the right attitude of will, it may take a very long time to bring him to right understanding. Suppose the Kingdom of God could come by eight o'clock to-morrow morning in the sense that every man would then be filled with a spirit of good will. What would have been accomplished? Much every way. The great obstacle to right understanding between man and man would have been removed. Still, the understandings would not come of themselves. Some would have still to give themselves to hard thinking, and all would have to wait for the slow teachings of experience. If all men

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should sincerely agree that justice is to be done in every department of life, the exact determination of what justice calls for in a particular situation would still have to be undertaken. The mere will to do right will not of itself tell just what is right in the incidence of taxation, or the adjustment of a currency scheme, or in the division between the wages of the laborer and the profits of the capitalist. In all the realms the Kingdom is to come, but the bridegroom will, we must fear, be long delayed in his arrival in some of the realms. The mind, as well as the heart and will, is to serve God. Both the training of the mind for service and the service itself require a long time. Happy is he whose thought of the ways of God is large enough not to be speedily exhausted.

The coming of the Kingdom impresses some as especially the coming of the truth, but how slow the truth is in coming! As we think of all the perplexities which confront us when we try to find our way to the light, we wonder why the divine plan does not

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call for some more clearly defined revelation to us. We may begin our lives thinking that if we could really get men to studying the Scriptures our various difficulties would disappear of themselves. Some have thought that we can best honor God as revealing Himself in the Scripture if we maintain that the Book does just this—give us the truth in such out-and-out clearness that there is not the slightest danger of mistake. If the Book is not a revelation of the truth in this way, is our view worthy of the Divine Mind which, we claim, speaks through the Book? If God has not given us a revelation of this sort, why has He not done so?

This query is like the words which we have in fancy put into the minds of the foolish ones in the parable. Why should the bridegroom be late? Why do you others take so much oil that you reflect upon the bridegroom? You who carry these larger supplies of oil clearly mean that the bridegroom is not interested, or that he is careless and slipshod. We show by the fact

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that we expect him soon the very highest faith in him. The query, taken out of its parabolic form, is the query that many faithful souls ask concerning the Divine Revelation in the Scriptures. Is God indifferent to us? Is He careless about us? If He is not, then let us not answer that the revelation of the truth is not spread out before us as an open book, which even the wayfaring man may understand.

This reference to the wayfaring man, a reference which we hear very often, is, rightly viewed, likely to put us on the track of a correct understanding. The wayfaring man knows what? What lies at the end of the journey? Not at all. He knows that he is on the right way and that he is faring in the right direction. If we take the Bible as a book of directions, we must remember that a book of directions is to direct, and after the directions have been given, we are to follow the directions. The most completely perfect directions conceivable must be obeyed if they are to lead to knowledge. In the Scripture revelation

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we are put upon the way, but walking in the way takes time. The gospel is not something that we learn by reading, or by hearing sermons, or by seeing it exemplified in lives around us. It is something to be learned by living, and living takes time. Some truths can of course be learned quickly, but the gospel is not always quickly understood. The gospel is good news, and it is the part of the followers of the Master to announce the good news. It may take the long years to reveal the meaning of the good news, however. A dashing horseman could have announced a victory of Cæsar, or of Cromwell, or of Washington, but the meaning of the victory could not be shouted from horseback. After the lapse of hundreds of years men may just begin to see the meaning of the horseman's cry. No,—in one sense the Kingdom of revelation does not come even at midnight, or at cock crow, or even in the morning after a long night of watching. Revelation comes as truth is lived. The man who insists that the truth must come soon is partly right,

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but his view is not complete enough. It will burn out before midnight. Truth takes its own time, regardless of our expectations. We must have oil for a long wait.

It may be that we give up the search for truth in any absolute sense and devote ourselves to some practical forms of endeavor, aiming through these to bring in the Kingdom. We consider some form of social relief as promising a real panacea. To our discomfiture, we find that the more clearly defined any such scheme is and the more it promises to give immediate relief, the more disappointing the outcome. What can be diviner than the impulse to move forth to the relief of congested districts in the cities? What more necessary than better housing for the poor, better playgrounds for the children, cleaner streets and ampler parks? Many a zealous heart, burdened at the slow coming of the Kingdom so far as deep understanding of the divine mysteries is concerned, has sought relief in the attempt to bring relief to the poor and unfortunate. His mind is distressed by the

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throbbing woe of the world, and he feels that his work will bring relief, and that right speedily. All that this worker believes is true, but he does not work long before he feels the tinge of disappointment. The problem does not yield as readily as he had hoped. Contrary to all his hopes and contrary to reason, as far as he can understand, the Kingdom still seems far off.

Disappointed here, he feels that what he longs for could be attained if it were not for the inequalities which prevail in life. He gives himself to some plan which goes deeper than the merely symptomatic, and which promises to reorganize the irregularities out of existence. He works for a more equitable division of political power, and, it may be, works with gratifying success. Still the Kingdom does not come and midnight draws on apace. He finds the center of the trouble to be industrial, and strives for industrial reorganization, and after a while gives up in despair. Now, what is the trouble? Is he illogical? Not necessarily. He may be altogether too

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logical, with that sharp hard-and-fastness which logic takes on when it gets away from life. Is it too much to expect that the universe is so ordered that it will respond to efforts which aim at the elimination of inequalities? No, it is not too much to assume this, but perhaps we are wrong as to the length of time required. Some relief can indeed be brought quickly, but many of the woes which we see around us are deep-seated. They have their roots in the nature of things and in the nature of men. Things and men must be made over. The successive improvements in control over matter and man will be marked by changes in political and industrial and social institutions, but those who deal solely with the institutions are merely taking advantage of the ripening of processes which move in depths not discernible from the surface. Greater control over nature by man and greater control over man by himself are the real keys to the Kingdom, and gain over these is not always quickly reached. We are back face to face with the same old

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problem, that of bringing the Kingdom into the lives of men whom we can reach with the gospel. With rich and poor, favored and unfortunate, the process is slower than we would have expected at the beginning. The Churches make mistakes and the schools make mistakes, but one lesson they are learning very thoroughly, the lesson that the bringing of the Kingdom requires time.

So it is not enough that the views with which we start forth to our work be consistent with themselves and worthy in themselves. Many a view which has promised much for the uplift of the race has perished not through any lack of logic, but through lack of size. It has burned out before midnight. And the tragedy of the insufficient thought is, that after it has burned out those who have devoted themselves to it from its first blaze to its final flickering gasp are often not able to adjust themselves at the last to the larger view. The Kingdom comes, but they are not able to rejoice intelligently in its coming. There

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is a striking statement in the Book of Revelation which the students tell us has a pathetic significance when viewed in the light of the experience of the early Church. The passage tells us of silence in heaven. The significance of the passage lies in the fact that the silence comes just when we should expect anything but silence. The drama seems to have come to a climax. Just at the moment when it seems that everything is to happen nothing happens. There is silence in heaven. But the stage is really set for a larger climax toward which the drama makes its way. The reference to the silence is full of the pathos of the experience of the early Church in its repeated disappointments over the return of the Lord, and yet the final outcome bespeaks the triumphant adjustment to the repeated delays. The climax was postponed, but was worth waiting for. So with every belief which is really large enough to adjust itself to silences in our heaven just when we would look for divine speech or the music of the bridegroom's followers. The disappoint-

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ment after all is but momentary. The new adjustment means a larger setting for the final meaning.

The wise virgins were wise in many ways. Having oil enough they adjusted themselves to the delay. No matter how long the bridegroom might wait, they were ready. And they were the ones who really trusted him. They knew that he would not come until he was ready. This is true faith in the Kingdom, to believe that it will come—when the divine plan calls for it. The sooner it comes the better, but the longer it delays the greater the faith which can not be burned out. And faithful souls are ready to wait until the cry arises, “Behold, the Kingdom cometh,” even if the cry does not arise till midnight.

IX

WE KNOW IN PART

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“For we know in part. . . .”—1 Corinthians 13:9.

THERE is a persistent misunderstanding of Christianity which looks upon Christianity as if it claimed to be especially and chiefly a system of formal knowledge. Is it not based upon the teachings of a Book? Does not the Church interpret the Book? Does not a true answer to these questions bring out the character of Christianity as a system of knowledge? Indeed, some so answer these questions as to make Christianity a rival of practically all the sciences, and then we have the conflicts between science and religion and the attempts at reconciliation.

It is really then something of a surprise to learn that the Book on which Christianity rests does not claim that Christianity is knowledge in the formal sense. The

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Book does not claim to be science or philosophy, as we are accustomed to use these terms. The theory of knowledge is not that which prevails in the class-room. Knowledge of which the Scriptures make the most does not come primarily out of formal investigation and does not stand altogether by the rules of science or logic.

This thought that Christianity makes claim to be a complete system of formal knowledge is not implied in the teachings of Jesus or of Paul. The text before us may be used to set forth the partial character of Christian knowledge. We know, indeed, but we know in part.

First of all, we are struck by the fact that Christianity insists from the very outset that there are some things which we must not know. In the story of disobedience which stands at the beginning of the Book we are told of a woe that came into the world through a search for forbidden knowledge. There is a whole world of possible knowledge which the Christian must not enter. Knowledge is worse than use-

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less when it comes out of transgression of moral law. To be sure, there are many prophets who would have us believe that knowledge exists for its own sake and in its own right, that knowledge which comes of doing evil has its own value, that we are to live our lives to the full, indulging ourselves in whatever direction desire moves. We are told that we must know life and the world if we would have the largest intelligence. In the name of such knowledge some obscure all difference between good and evil. Good and evil both come from the one source, and both alike are legitimate objects of knowledge.

We can see how such a theory might arise through the fault of the believer in good. A false Puritanism might limit too narrowly the field of the good, and shut life out from the enjoyment of much that is natural and wholesome. When this occurs revolt in the name of larger life is to be expected, and even to be welcomed. But revolt which ignores moral distinctions, which would bid men enter the Kingdom through

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disobedience to moral law, is not Christian. There is a possible realm of knowledge which can be reached through flouting the moral insight. Laws work in that realm as in every other, and the man who knows the evil must know the penalty also. Gratified selfishness or ambition or envy—all this can be known. A man may even justify the knowledge by a loose theory which makes these things necessities in the universe, but the man ends in spiritual poverty. Some knowledge is like poor land—the more we have, the poorer we are. It is possible to be “knowledge-poor” just as it is possible to be “land-poor.” Christianity limits knowledge at the very outset to the knowledge which may be gained by doing the will of a holy and loving God. It has no place for an “absolute” knowledge which would include knowledge of evil. For every good item of knowledge there is a possible evil item. For every knowledge earned by doing right there is a possible knowledge to be reached by doing evil. In a sense, then, Christianity cuts the kingdom of knowledge

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squarely in two, and limits the mind to the good half. The less we know of evil the better. The only justification for our knowledge of evil at all is to be found as that knowledge comes not out of our own transgression, but of an attempt to help others out of transgression. And even here the knowledge is distressing, if not impoverishing. The man seeking to redeem his fellows from moral squalor is sustained indeed by his high resolve, but even he feels that he must now and again escape from his accustomed field to breathe a pure air. The worker among pagan systems where self-indulgence and deceit and revenge are taken as a matter-of-course, learns much about human nature when that nature is not touched by Christian influences, but he would gladly blot from his memory all the knowledge of this sort, inevitable though it is in his attempts at the redemption of his fellows.

There are some things, then, that the Christian must not know. Again, there are some things that he may not know, and

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need not know. Saving knowledge can only be knowledge that saves. Some knowledge is important enough in its way, but not important vitally. The Master's characterizations of the Kingdom of God all deal with vital concerns, and the knowledge which is important has this reference to life. Jesus speaks of the Kingdom as a growing seed, as a dragnet cast into the sea and filled with fish of every kind, as treasure hid in a field, as the pearl for which the buyer gave his all, as the leaven which the woman hid in the meal till the whole was leavened. In all these figures there is implied, first, a knowledge which is important, and a further knowledge, which though important, is not most important. In the case of the growing grain the essential knowledge is how to plant and tend and reap and gather into barns and use the prepared grains for food. The highly specialized knowledge of grain which the technical scientist enjoys is very important, but not all farmers are scientists and not all farmers need be scientists. The knowledge

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of the part which grain plays in the development of society, knowledge which the historian or the sociologist possesses is valuable, but not all farmers are historians or sociologists. The fine beauty which the poet or the painter sees in a field of waving grain is indeed worth while, but not every farmer has the soul of a painter or poet, and not every painter or poet would make a farmer. It is not necessary for the caster of the dragnet to be an ichthyologist. It is not necessary for the woman who puts the leaven in the meal to know the bacteriology of the yeast plant. Bread was made, and good bread, too, long before the microscope was invented. And a pearl stands in its own beauty by its own right. It is not necessary to know the pearl as a specialist knows it in order to appreciate the pearl.

Just so there is a knowledge of the Kingdom which is essential and a knowledge about the Kingdom which is important, but not so essential. How to grow grain, how to catch fish, how to make bread, how to enjoy pearls—these are the essential

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questions. Of course, it is not always easy to draw the line between what is essential and what is not essential. The highly specialized knowledge has its practical importance. The scientist can teach the most practical of farmers how to grow more grain and better, or the fisherman where to find better fish, or the housewife how to bake better bread, or the pearl seeker how to pick the finest pearls. But it is not necessary for the ordinary worker in any of these fields to have a finely articulated body of knowledge which is the delight of the specialist.

There is to-day a highly developed body of knowledge of religious factors. The historian, the student of the social sciences, the modern Biblical scholar, the psychologist, all these and many others have wrought together to understand religion. In what sense is the knowledge which they have found "saving" knowledge? In the sense that it saves—saves from ignorance and from misunderstanding and false perspective in religion. It saves, however, not through

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the worshipers' becoming specialists. That would be altogether impossible even in a community of extraordinary general intelligence. For general intelligence is not special intelligence. If one hundred thousand worshipers out of hundreds of thousands in the Churches of America could give any sort of orderly summary of even the main facts of Church history or could state in tolerably systematic form the generally accepted results of modern Biblical study, the number would be very large indeed. This is no reflection upon the intelligence of the Churches or the importance of the work of the specialist. For the majority of believers do not have time to be specialists in religious knowledge. They have to be specialists in other directions. And the success of the specialist is measured by the degree to which his results work through preachers and teachers and other leaders to bring about spiritual nourishment for the mass of believers. Some conceptions which were once thought important the people no longer hear, and others they hear with a

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changed emphasis. They may not know why the change came about, but they partake of the advantage of the change. An agricultural experiment station will make for better farming, though the farmer may not have followed the experiments which are responsible for the changed results, and though the man who eats the bread may never have heard of the experiment station.

But is it not necessary for us to know what our fathers believed? How can we keep the faith if we do not know the faith? The answer to this question is another—What is faith? The answer is that faith is life. The question then becomes one as to how we can perpetuate the religious life which the fathers bequeathed us to. Their beliefs were instruments which produced the life, or rather food which nourished the life. The best way to honor the beliefs of the past would seem to be to seek for ourselves the sort of life which these beliefs made possible for the believers of another day.

The knowledge of how things have come to be what they are is important, but not

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so important as the ability to see the worth of what is now here—the worth, that is to say, of the thing on its own account. After we have answered the question as to how our idea came to us, the further question remains as to what the idea is worth now that it is here. If the idea is not worth anything it is not worth our asking how it got here, except for guidance against courses in the future which may lead to error. If the idea is important in itself, the investigation as to how it came to be is interesting, but not vitally important. The ideas which make up the essence of Christianity must finally stand or fall by the appeal which they make in and of themselves. Who wrote this or that part of the Scriptures, under what circumstances the passage was written, the date of the passage—these questions are important only as throwing light on the meaning of the passage for us, now that we have it. The material environment that accompanied the rise of this or that conception on the part of the Church or individual is not as important

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as the question as to what the insight is in itself worth.

The Master speaks of His Kingdom as a pearl. The pearl stands in its own right and makes its own appeal. The ancients thought of the pearl as condensed dew of heaven. The modern thought is much more prosaic. It is interesting to know the process by which pearls come to be. It is interesting to know the thought which the ancients held concerning the pearl. The pearl must have indeed seemed beautiful to the ancients to have inspired so beautiful a thought of its origin. After all, however, the pearl is pearl, and the Kingdom of God is pearl. Certain great ideas concerning God and man, lived out in a life which is at once the supreme hope and complete despair of man—all this is the Kingdom of God. The life itself is its own best witness as to its being of God. Historical interpretations when mistaken have value in showing the impression which the life made upon minds of a former day. When true, the interpretations are also inter-

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esting, but it is not necessary to have large knowledge of the interpretations. Better know these if we can, but the all-essential is the life itself.

Some things, then, we must not know, some things we may or may not know. A third limitation of Christian knowledge comes when we realize that there are some things which we can not know.

From some knowledge we are shut out by insufficient data. It would be very enjoyable, for example, to know more about origins of the world and of revelations to men than we do, but the data are far in the past, and we can get at them only by guessing. It would be interesting to understand better some of the great events in the history of the Kingdom of God and some experiences in the life of this or that mighty seer. We find to our positive distress that an atmosphere through which another age looked at its problems is beyond our reach. We can not reproduce the medium through which the age looked. We find, too, that the peculiarities of nature or of temperament

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which made some particular seer what he was were really distinctively his, and not ours. It might be possible for a soul here and there to come into intimate and sympathetic understanding of St. Francis of Assisi, but not many can hope for such experiences. There were in the lives of the disciples of Jesus marvelous experiences no doubt entirely real, but also entirely foreign to the mental possibilities of our time.

If it is impossible for us to know the past, it is equally impossible for us to know the future. The wisest statesman can not foresee a national course for even a few years, and the individual knoweth not what a day will bring forth. Here, indeed, the limitation of human knowledge is a positive mercy. Who of us could endure to have his future opened before his gaze? Who would be strong enough to receive such a revelation? If the future is to be one of prosperity the knowledge of the fact might be unsettling. If the future is to be one of woe we might not even have the strength to receive the revelation. The only way for

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the revelation of the future to be safe is to have it come as it now does, through the successive experiences that lead up to it. We prepare for the future by living through to-day.

We are not strong enough to know some things. It would not be safe to entrust some knowledge in our keeping. In general, the race can have larger knowledge of the secret of control over material forces by coming to such a measure of self-control as will insure the right use of the forces. Quite likely the race has now as much knowledge as can at present be profitably used. The only way to get more is rightly to use what we now have. The power developed by right use is the key to advance of knowledge, and a lack of the power is a limitation upon the knowledge.

More and more, too, it dawns upon us that in religious matters there are some realms which it would be rash to inquire into too closely. The Scriptures are above all a revelation of the heart of God, and revelations of love, of moral feeling, are not

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to be made the subjects of over-bold speculation. Our objections to many theories of the moral relations of God and man are not based upon logical shortcomings in these theories, so much as upon our unwillingness to speak with loud familiarity upon problems of such a kind.

And over all, too, is the growing insight that in some realms knowledge like that which comes of scientific demonstration or of logical proof is beyond us. We frankly admit that we can not find God with the telescope or prove His existence by the syllogism. We can not demonstrate immortality or prove logically that we are free. True, we are in no worse plight than seekers after high knowledge in any realm, but we admit that many fundamental conceptions are beyond the realm of formal proof and that we have no way of bringing these within the realm of such proof.

What, now, is the value of such negative reflection? We find that our minds move within limitations set by what we must not know, and by what it is not necessary for

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us to know, and by what we can not know. We get some comfort from the fact that knowledge of limitations is itself knowledge, and knowledge of practical worth. If we must not know some things we will keep away from them; if it is not necessary for us to learn some truths we will learn what we can and let the rest go. If we can not mathematically prove some conceptions we will not try.

We know in part, said the apostle. Our inquiries lead us up to a final consideration, the things we must know. In spite of all changing forms there are some truths that remain substantially the same from age to age. The Christian warfare is like other warfare, in that while the detailed methods of the conflict change, the great back-lying conceptions which give meaning to and determine the outcome remain the same from age to age. The students of military history tell us that while a Julius Cæsar, resurrected to look at a battle of a modern war, would be entirely confused on the firing line, he would be altogether at home in the general's

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tent, that the great conceptions as to handling a campaign are relatively fixed. So in the Christian warfare the old large question is ever to the fore—the question as to a man's finding God and gaining the secret of divine life.

We are coming to see, too, that it is possible even in our limited sphere to lay hold on principles of universal value. We are like dwellers by some cove in a riverside to which, though it is far inland, the tide makes its way. In that remote cove a watchful mind can learn the essential laws of the tide. Such observer may have no idea of the magnificent sweep of the sea up a beach, he may not know the power of the tide around the South Sea Islands, but he nevertheless has knowledge which holds good wherever the sea reaches. So in the Kingdom of God some principles are of use anywhere. The necessity of devotion to holiness, the imperial dignity of the law of good will, the surpassing worth of unselfishness—these learned in however small a sphere hold good anywhere. Into whatever

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part of the universe our souls may fare we shall be confident that such knowledge will pass at full value.

Or to draw an illustration from another field, we may think of the Christian religion as the theme of a great musical production. The theme is the same from age to age, but the setting may be different with succeeding ages. It is well known that Handel never heard his own Messiah sung by more than a few score singers. Probably he never heard the Messiah rendered with such skill as many of my readers are familiar with, but Handel knew the Messiah nevertheless. The great song of redemption may vary with the setting which each age gives it, but essentially it is the same song and men carry the divine song down through the centuries.

Or we may think of the meaning of a word or of the essential reality back of a word. The arbitrary characters which set forth the idea of love vary in different languages and different ages, but the experience itself is intelligible across any flight of time. If the archæologist comes upon a love story

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upon a Babylonian tablet he finds the story as intelligible in its essential passion or triumph or pathos as if it dropped from yesterday's printing press. The story of the love of God for men means more with the passing of the years. It is set forth in characters that more adequately express it, but it is essentially the same story that the saints have known from the beginning. We know, too, that the indescribable and very real something which we call the "spirit" of a life can be seized and passed on from generation to generation. The man whose face is set towards righteousness can be understood no matter from how far a land or time he speaks. Ancient lovers of righteousness and ancient haters of the good are altogether intelligible wherever their records come to light.

Now, the Christianity of Christ is a certain conception of God and man, a certain principle for the guidance of life, a certain seizure of a meaning, a certain experience of righteous spirit. These truths, being within the reach of all, are obligatory

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on those who would really be thought of as Christian. The Christian revelation turns around the thought of taking the very best in human life and seizing this as a revelation of God.

The knowledge which is of Christ is within the reach of all. It comes as the disciple sets his life toward the life in Christ. Professor Peabody has told us that the word of the Fourth Gospel about Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, does not place its phrases accidentally. Christ is the Way. By walking in the way we attain to the Truth, and the Truth shows itself in Life. The Truth then is that middle term reached by obedience and proving itself in increasing satisfaction and fullness of life.

We come at last to the idea that the limitation of Christian knowledge is really a relief and a deliverance. We are not saved by knowledge like unto the knowledge of the scribes. We are not saved by the classification of facts or the proof of propositions. We have before us a way in which we can walk toward the Truth which

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enriches life. If we would have the Life, we must walk in the way of life. The Truth which is obligatory upon the Christian is the Truth which comes out of doing the will of God.

We know in part. The words were written by a man whose knowledge was, on its formal side, removed at an immense distance from us. He lived in a world strange to us of to-day. We have to employ scholars to interpret to us the world of theological conception in which he lived. Yet no books outside the Gospels are read with greater avidity by the saints than the Epistles of Paul—and that too by saints who are not reading for theology. Paul so filled the knowledge which he used with his fundamental thought of God and man, with his devotion to Christ, with the spirit of enthusiasm for the holiness and love of God, that in respect to all knowledge essentially Christian Paul is intelligible for all time. Paul admitted the limitations of his own knowledge. He knew only in part, but he knew. He knew not because he had been

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taught by Gamaliel. He had been informed of certain matters by Gamaliel, and that information has long since passed away. He knew Christ because he had lived so close to the spirit of Christ that he could say that Christ was in him and he in Christ. He knew out of life, and, though he knew only in part, the part was supremely worth while. We know, indeed, only in part, but the part which we know we have learned by walking in the way, which leads to the Truth, which makes life worth living. To know Christ is the essential knowledge.

